

RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES OF MEXICAN-WHITE COUPLES IN TEXAS

A Thesis

by

JENNIFER CASSANDRA GUILLEN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2010

Major Subject: Sociology

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Chair of Committee,	Rogelio Saenz
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ABSTRACT

Racial and Ethnic Identities of Mexican-White Couples in Texas. (December 2010)

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This thesis is a result of qualitative research conducted with individuals in interracial, Mexican-White couples in Southeast, Texas. This study calls into question the ways in which individuals in these relationships self-identify and how they perceive and are perceived by their partners. There are several conclusions reached during this study. First, the results partially support Omi and Winant's (1994) argument that racial and ethnic identities are fluid and dynamic among non-White individuals, as is shown by the availability of labels and the variation in selecting those identities. Second, the analysis shows that Whites impose the label "Hispanic" onto their Mexican partners, regardless of how these self-identify. Finally, the identity of Whites does not support Omi and Winant's (1994) argument that racial and ethnic identities are fluid and dynamic. On the contrary, behaviors and attitudes among Whites shift, but their identity is static. This reflects the retention of White power and privilege associated with White identity.

This analysis utilized forty in-depth interviews of individuals living in a small to medium sized metropolitan area in Texas, and who were asked to discuss ethnic and

racial identity as it is self-identified, and perceived and imposed by their partners. Respondents revealed extensive variation in responses as to how individuals in these couples racially and ethnically self-identified, identified their partners, as well as, what factors may or may not affect those identifications. Results indicate a complex relationship between individuals in interracial and interethnic relationships and their constructions of identity that influence racial and ethnic identifications.

DEDICATION

*A mi madre, sin ti esto no sería posible.
Te adoro. Gracias por todos tus sacrificios. Eres mi inspiración.*

To all those who have had a part in this process

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Rogelio Saenz, for his support, advice, guidance, attention, friendship and patience without which this project would not have been possible. Rogelio, muchísimas gracias por su paciencia y consejos durante este tiempo. Sin usted y su sabiduría, esta maestría jamás hubiera sido posible. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Zulema Valdez and Dr. Marco Portales, for their input, support, and friendship throughout this journey.

I would also like to thank the Melburn G. Glasscock Center at Texas A&M University for their help in funding this research project. Additionally, I would like to thank the Sociology Department and the Office of Graduate Studies at Texas A&M University for their roles in my graduate journey, which without them would have been more difficult.

Thanks also go to friends and colleagues, as well as, the department faculty and staff for helping me during this time. A special thanks to all those who put up with me, listened, offered kind gestures, gave constructive criticism, bounced ideas back and forth, crossed paths with me, bought me a cup of coffee, and had a helping hand in any way, academically and non-academically.

I also want to extend my gratitude to all research participants who kindly lent their time to participate in this study.

Finally, I would also like to thank my family, both biological and that which has come together throughout the years. First, and foremost, my mom and dad are

everything to me. Mommala, without you this would've never been possible. You're my role model, my inspiration, my voice of reason, my support, and my biggest fan. I love you. Artemio, gracias por las llamadas, los correos electrónicos, las conversaciones, las discusiones políticas, las patoaventuras y sobretodo, por compartir tan abiertamente tu vida conmigo. Te quiero mucho y gracias por ser mi figura paterna. José, gracias por tener debates políticos conmigo, por las conversaciones, las risas y los abrazos. Te quiero mucho. A todos los amigos y estudiantes de mi mamá, ustedes también han sido una parte integral de mi vida y de este proceso, les agradezco mucho su presencia, sus consejos y su cariño. Gracias a todas las tías y tíos que me han adoptado a través de los años—Marci y Chefo, Helaine, Judith y Rogelio, y Anna.

To my other family—those locally and those scattered globally—thank you for the adventures, the laughter and the sanity. Mi familia Mexicana—gracias por todas las pato-choco-aventuras, las llamadas, las skypeadas y todas las risas, no hubiera sobrevivido sin su apoyo y cariño.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

While the contributions of Latino laborers to the economy of the United States and the stigmatization of exploited migrants have been acknowledged by the academy, little research exists about the construction of Latinos as racialized subjects. As of the second half of the 20th century, immigration to the United States has significantly changed in racial and ethnic composition in comparison to earlier waves of European immigration (Massey 1995). In 1965 a major turning point in immigration to the United States was the amendment of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which abolished the use of the National Origins formula, a system of immigration quotas. As more non-White immigrants were allowed into the United States, the racial composition changed. Today, individuals from Asia and Latin America comprise about 80% of all immigrants (Qian and Lichter 2000). As a result of these changes in immigration reform and the abolishment of miscegenation laws in 1967, interracial marriages have increased significantly, especially between Whites and racial minorities, including African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and American Indians (Heer 1974; Kalmijn 1993; Murguia and Cazares 1982). By the late 1990s, over 30% of married Asian or Latino partners were married to individuals of another race and a large proportion were married to a White partner (Bean and Stevens 2003). Given the increases in rates of interracial marriages between Whites and Latinos, the interactions between couples and the

This thesis follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.

contexts in which they take place may play important roles in racial and ethnic identity formation among these individuals.

Sociological research discussing issues of racial and ethnic identity among individuals in interracial relationships has shown to be very limited. Much of the research in the area of racial and ethnic identity formation has looked at how individuals produce, reproduce, or modify their identities within their own contexts (Alba 1990; Nagel 2001; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008; Waters 1990, 2000). This thesis focuses on contributing to the body of research on ethnic and racial identity formation by examining the ways in which Mexican¹-White interracial couples navigate their individual identities and their partner's identities in a racially stratified, White space.

Omi and Winant (2002) use the term racial formation to refer to “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p.124). They argue that racial formation is situated where human bodies and social structures are represented and organized; and, that racial formation is linked to the way in which society is structured and ruled.

Racial formation requires one to differentiate between people of various racial groups. For many, this distinction is largely based on physical cues on phenotypes. Others use a constructionist perspective, which argues that race is a social construction. For example, Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) place racial identity within the context of nation and class where they analyze imposed racialization and self-racialization, while

¹ For the purposes of this study, Mexican will refer to all people of Mexican descent, whether native-born or foreign-born.

simultaneously considering racial identity and collective repression, the struggle for collective autonomy, and the search for collective shelter.

One of the issues for people of Latin American origin is that the U.S.'s racial classification system is usually characterized as dichotomous, Black and White, while the Latin American racial identification varies depending on shades of skin color (Denton and Massey 1989; Murguia and Forman 2003). According to Denton and Massey (1989), many Caribbean Hispanics reject the strict racially dichotomous system of racial classification in the United States. Their data, from the 1980 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), showed that Hispanics identified mostly as white, with a few identifying as Black. Similarly, Murguia and Forman (2003) suggest that immigrants from Latin America do not identify solely in terms of Black or White, but also include racial identifications that fall in between the two.

Ethnic identity, on the other hand, is socialized into values, traditions, and behaviors of each ethnic group. The two basic building blocks for ethnicity are identity and culture. Because these are constructed, individuals and groups may attempt to focus on issues of boundaries and significance of ethnicity (Nagel 1994). According to Nagel (1994), the construction of ethnic identity and culture comes as a result of both structure and agency. Ethnicity is constructed by the actions of ethnic groups, which shape and reshape self-identification and culture. Ethnicity also becomes constructed by social, economic, and political processes and interactions as they shape and reshape ethnic categories.

Identity is a complex internal and interpersonal process that needs to be understood in relation to social groups. Given the complex nature of interracial relationships, whether in personal, interpersonal or societal spheres, the process of racial and/or ethnic identity formation may be especially important for individuals in interracial relationships. Some researchers suggest that identity proceeds through an internalization of one's relationship to others (Ashmore and Jussim 1997; Hershel 1995). According to these researchers, the process of racial and ethnic identity formation is both a personal and public process that is simultaneously influenced by broader cultural, social and racial attitudes (Hershel 1995). Looking at racial and/or ethnic identity solely as an internal process ignores the importance of the socio-cultural context of identity development. Furthermore, racial and/or ethnic identity formation is not only influenced by social factors, but develops in response to an environment that allocates resources differently for different racial and/or ethnic groups. Thus, the formation of racial and ethnic identity differs for individuals in the dominant social group versus minority group members. It is important to study interracial relationships because being in these relationships may influence or challenge one's thinking about one's racial identity, in some cases, for the first time. In addition, despite of the individual's place in the racial identity process prior to their interracial relationship, being in a relationship with a person of color may also influence their racial identity process.

By situating this research within symbolic interactionist framework, a few assumptions can be made: (1) we know things by their meanings, (2) meanings are created through social interactions, and (3) meanings change through interaction

(Blumer 1969, 1986). Indeed, the symbolic interactionist perspective suits the needs of this research project because “interracial couples can be understood as social products in that they are formed and transformed by the defining process that takes place in social interaction, the ways in which others act towards them, and just as important, the ways in which others produce images and ideas about them and their relationships (Chito Childs 2005:44; see also Mead 1934).

Identity theory, an approach based within symbolic interactionism, sees identity as a part of the self that has a collective understanding of what it means to be part of a group (White and Burke 1987). In the case of ethnicity, identity theory considers ethnic identity as a common group understanding of what it means to be of that ethnicity. Interactionists suggest that identity is one of many shared meanings a person attributes to their self. Specifically, ethnic identity reflects an understanding shared by members of a given ethnic group, as well as, to what it means to be part of that group. Symbolic interactionism—in a similar fashion to constructionism—“looks at the ways in which individuals and groups create and recreate their personal and collective histories, the membership boundaries of their group, and the content and meaning of their ethnicity” (Nagel 1994:154).

This research is also guided by two theories of racialization, systemic racism and Latin Americanization theory. First, systemic racism examines how racist practices have become embedded in American social, economic and political structures. Specifically, systemic racism outlines the historical foundation of racism in the United States, which led to the creation of wealth and privilege for Europeans and European Americans

through the exploitation of people of color (Feagin 2000). Second, Bonilla-Silva's (1996, 2002) Latin Americanization theory argues that although the United States has long run along biracial, White and Black lines, the post-civil rights era caused a restructuring into a tri-racial system similar to that found in many Latin American and Caribbean nations. Bonilla-Silva (2002) suggests that this tri-racial system will be comprised of "Whites" at the top, "honorary Whites" in the middle, and a non-White group, the "collective Black" at the bottom. Together, systemic racism and Latin Americanization theory investigate how it is that racial hierarchies are created and reproduced.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The fundamental question this research attempts to address is: How are racial and ethnic identities affected, if at all, among interracial couples living in a mostly White space? Research in the area of race has become increasingly interested in the ways in which places take on racial meaning and significance (Anderson 1991; Gilmore 2002). That research, with a few exceptions, investigates the experiences of oppressed groups within a marginalized space, as can be seen in studies of residential segregation. By focusing on an oppressed space, a voice is given to members of the oppressed group while also exposing how the agency of privileged groups contributed to the creation and reproduction of dominant places. To further understand the exchanges between dominant and oppressed groups in a White space, symbolic interactionism, social identity theory, and theories of racialization will be the leading paradigms used.

Similar to researchers on multiracial identities who use symbolic interactionism as a framework to examine how identities, as validated self-understandings, are affirmed or negated, usually through confirmation from others, I intend to analyze how interracial couples confirm each other's racial and ethnic identities so that they can be developed and maintained. As a result, some of the broad questions guiding this research are:

- How are racial and ethnic identities created and maintained through social interaction?
- How are racial and ethnic identities affected by social interaction?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The significance of this study is twofold. First, the study brings attention to White and Mexican relations in the context of interracial relationships, as well as in the context of White spaces, all the while attempting to fill some of the gaps in the literature regarding racial and ethnic identity. Second, this study will demonstrate through the lenses of the participant's how members of a larger society can help shape individuals' sense of ethnic-racial identity. With respect to the specific contributions, this thesis seeks to expand the body of sociological knowledge with a theoretical contribution to the theories of racial and ethnic identity formation.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This research focuses on the racial and ethnic identities of people of Mexican descent as well as Whites. The literature review will be broken down into four sections. First, a general overview on the literature available regarding racial and ethnic identities and the process of identity formation will be provided. Second, a discussion on research conducted on Hispanic and Latino ethnic identities within the context of the United States will be analyzed. Third, research conducted on how White racial identity is affected will be discussed. And, lastly, research on interracial relationships dealing with identity will be examined.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Identity

In order to study men and women in interracial relationships, it is necessary to position this work within studies of race and racism. First, I reject any biological definitions of race, such as Wilkinson (1987) who defines race as “a category of persons who are related by a common heredity or ancestry and who are perceived and responded to in terms of external features or traits” (p. 185). More specifically, this study utilizes a constructionist approach, which argues that racial and ethnic identities are dynamic and formed through an internal process of self-identification and an external classification by others (Cornell and Hartmann 1997; Nagel 1994; Omi and Winant 1994). This research

project will use racial identity formation based in everyday experience because socialization into racialized systems, racial classifications and personal racial identification are often a learned experience (Omi and Winant 1994). Thus, as individuals we are placed in a broad racialized social structure. Race then becomes a discursive means identified on an individual level and then routinized and standardized at the institutional and organizational levels. Therefore, we cannot speak of race without situating it in a social structural and historical context (Omi and Winant 1994).

Racial and ethnic identity formation is a dynamic process across multiple levels and contexts (Ashmore and Jussim 1997; Suyemoto 2002), as well as a process that is constantly constructed and reconstructed through experience. This process does not happen solely on an individual level; racial and ethnic identities are created through relationships and relational contexts to which the individual gives meaning (Ashmore and Jussim 1997). The process of racial and ethnic identity formation is both a personal and public process that is simultaneously influenced by broader cultural, social, and racial attitudes (Hershel 1995).

Cornell and Hartmann (1997) propose that there are three basic factors involved in identity construction—boundaries, perceived position, and meaning. Boundaries imply that there is a construction and positioning of borders that separate groups of people from each other, including what criteria are followed to determine inclusion or exclusion. Secondly, a group's position refers to how members of a group are perceived in relation to other groups in an already stratified society. Lastly, group meaning refers to how others assign an individual to a group and how a group validates an individual,

depending on the factors associated with that particular group's membership. When specifically discussing racial and ethnic identification, Cornell and Hartmann (2004) argue that "race is more exclusive and less flexible than ethnicity" (p.28) because race relies more heavily on assignment by others, usually based on physical appearance such as skin color. It is important to note that although the Black-White dichotomy has historically been the dominant race paradigm in the United States, other groups have also been subject to racialization as "non-White," including Asians, Native Americans, and Latinos (Foley 2004; Menchaca 2002).

Ian Haney-López (2006) has examined how racial identity has been constructed by means of the law. According to his work, society creates, defines, and regulates itself by means of the legal system. And, therefore, because race is socially constructed, it is partially legally reproduced and "Put most starkly, [the] law constructs race" (Haney-López 2006:7). The law then not only codifies race by giving it a definition but also defines the range of domination and subordination that comprises race relations. For Haney-López (2006), that range of domination and subordination suggests that race is constructed in the legal system through coercion and ideology where the legal actors may be conscious or unsuspecting.

Hartigan (1997a) draws particular attention to the family as "perhaps the most critical site for the generation and reproduction of racial formations" (p. 184) as well as the location "that generates a great degree of variation in how racial categories gain and lose their significance" (Hartigan 1997a:184). Hartigan (1997a) also notes that the meanings given to race depend in large part on whether individual families reproduce

heterogeneous or homogeneous racial categories, thereby making families an ideal place to explore racial categories. Racial identities, although always present, can be either actively or passively articulated. Situations exist on a continuum and at certain junctures a racial aspect of a situation may be significant, whereas at other times, or in a different situation, the racial meaning may not be salient.

Hispanic/Latino Ethnic Identity

The term Hispanic, like many other ethnic labels used to identify minorities in the United States, introduces the question of how people are defined and stratified as well as how they define themselves. It also indicates that there is a gap between how people of Latin American descent self-identify and how they are defined by a term created and used by others to identify them. Hispanic is also a term that generalizes the social and political experiences of millions of people of different races, classes, languages, national origins, genders, and religions. Nelson and Tienda (1997) note that, “‘Hispanic’ as a label combines colonized natives and their offspring, foreigner and political refugees under one ethnic umbrella, but the coherence of this label is questionable on theoretical and historical grounds” (p.8). Currently, there is a debate on which label, Hispanic or Latino, is more encompassing and appropriate to represent people of Latin American descent. Hayes-Bautista and Chapa (1987) propose using the term “Latino” to describe a national- origin group from a certain geographical region that has been viewed and treated as a racial group, individually and institutionally, in the United States. According to their definition, “Latino” suggests a conscious choice versus the impositions of the “Hispanic” label.

With the Latino population increasing rapidly in the United States and because that population is mostly comprised of Mexican people, it is important to understand that Mexican Americans vary in their ethnic identification. Latino identification in the context of racial and ethnic categories in the United States is also one that has caused considerable confusion among people unaccustomed to the Black-White binary of U.S. racial categories. According to Tienda and Mitchell (2006), ethnic labels such as “Hispanic” and “Latino” are constantly being used alongside other racial labels such as “Asian,” “Black,” and “White,” in such ways that “many Hispanics are beginning to view themselves as a separate race” (p.41). By viewing themselves as a separate race, Latinos are blurring the Black-White lines in the racial hierarchy of the United States. By doing so, the implications for the overall racial stratification are unclear. Laura E. Gomez (2007) reiterates some of the same points made by Tienda and Mitchell (2006) and claims that Mexican Americans, specifically, have a history of being classified as what she calls “off-white” because throughout history² they have been legally defined as white, but treated socially as non-white. With these issues of identification in mind, this subsection aims to look at various studies focusing on Latino ethnicity as it pertains to self-identification and reflections on racial and ethnic stratification in the United States. Also, for the purposes of this study, I will use the term “Latino” to describe people of Latin American descent, which includes my population of interest, Mexican Americans.

² For more information on the history of Mexican Americans in the legal system, see Michael Olivas’ book *“Colored Men” and “Hombres Aquí” Hernández v. Texas and the Emergence of Mexican-American Lawyering*. *Hernández v. Texas* (1954) is an important case prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* deciding that Mexican Americans and all other racial groups had equal protection under the 14th Amendment of the Constitution.

This section will examine previous research that documents and discusses issues of Latino self-identity and identification in the United States.

Suzanne Oboler's (1995) study on Latinos and ethnic labels shows that there is a "gap between the self-identification of people of Latin American descent and their definition through a label created and used by others" (p.2). Her study, based on interviews with 22 Spanish-speaking workers in the garment industry in New York who were enrolled in English as a Second Language class, focused on the meanings of the terms "Hispanic" as it was perceived by individuals as part of their self-identification, and as they thought it played a role in their everyday life. She found that most of the interview respondents defined themselves in terms of the continent's geography. Respondents found the word "Hispanic" to be a negative term because of how it categorizes Spanish-speaking people into one label that assumes that everyone has the same experience through language (Oboler 1995).

Despite the rich information on the ways that Latinos construct their social and racial identities, Oboler's work lacks analysis of Latinos' experiences in a racially stratified society. For example, theorists focusing on racialized systems have emphasized that the structure of racism occurs in social networks at various levels of society (Bonilla Silva 2002; Feagin 2006). Unlike these theorists, Oboler (1995) does not include discussions of social networks other than the mention of garment workers and participant recruitment at English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Furthermore, relational variations, such as kinship, friendship groups, and relationships, are not

discussed, which, as Kiang and Fuligni (2009) have pointed out, is lacking in research on ethnic identity.

Alejandro Portes and Dag MacLeod (1996) surveyed second-generation school youth in Florida and California about how they identified themselves in an open-ended questionnaire. From the responses, they classified self-identification into four categories: non-hyphenated American, hyphenated American, non-hyphenated foreign nationality, and Hispanic. Upon further analysis, they found that “Hispanic-identified adolescents tend to come from lower-status families and to have lower knowledge of the host society’s language and culture” (Portes and MacLeod 1996:543). By incorporating Lopez and Espiritu’s (1990) and Massey’s (1993) work, Portes and MacLeod (1996) conclude that populations of Latin American descent in the United States are too varied to create a coherent whole. The problem with a study like Portes and MacLeod’s (1996) is that it does not take into account any structural determinants, social and cultural contexts, or relational variants.

Thomas Macias (2004) explores how third-plus generation Mexican Americans are able to perpetuate Mexican ethnicity within relatively integrated environments in Phoenix, Arizona and San Jose, California. This study draws on Herbert Gans’ (1979) idea of “symbolic ethnicity,” which argues that ethnicity serves as an expressive function versus an instrumental one in third-plus generation European Americans. Other research on “symbolic ethnicity” suggests that Mexican Americans do not follow the same multiple-generation patterns described by Gans (Keefe 1992; Keefe and Padilla 1987; Velez-Ibañez 1996). Keefe and Padilla (1987), for example, argue that although

interactions between Mexican Americans and Anglos have increased in the second generation, ethnic social interactions remain strong through the fourth generation. Therefore, Macias' work seeks "not to debunk 'symbolic ethnicity' but rather to test its limits by taking into account the social relations, both 'direct' and 'indirect,' which continue to inform Mexican ethnicity past the second generation" (Macias 2004:301). Macias focused on Mexican Catholicism, Spanish-language television viewership, and cross-national encounters. The analysis of Mexican Catholicism showed that there was a lack of social connection to Catholicism, mainly applying to the Church as an institution. Despite that, interactions with older generations of Mexican Americans and modifications of folk practices that complemented contemporary rites of passage and holidays showed that a connection to Catholicism continues as an ethnically meaningful connection (Macias 2004).

The discussion of Spanish-language television viewership showed that Spanish-language television "allowed third-plus-generation Mexican Americans to imagine themselves as part of a broad ethnic collectivity via electronic media" (Macias 2004:312). However, as Macias points out, Davila's (2001) critique of Latino marketing argues that through advertising efforts to convince Latino consumers of Latino homogeneity in the U.S. market, advertisers tend to downplay generational, class and national origin differences among Latinos. In his study, Macias found that in a way his data suggested that Latino-targeted television reinforces Mexican ethnicity among the third-plus generation because it is interpreted and shared through relationships with other Mexican Americans.

Macias' work also shows that cross-national encounters depend on relationships with people of Mexican origin. Visits to Mexico, helping a Mexican co-worker, and hiring Mexican immigrants for work were among the cross-national experiences shared by research respondents in Macias' (2004) work. And although these are direct relational resources, they are still relationships that are less embedded in the ethnic community than growing up in a Mexican American household or neighborhood. Regardless, these experiences can later lead to more embedded ethnic practices, such as becoming interested in art or literature because of a relationship with someone from Mexico or a trip to Mexico (Macias 2004).

Another important component of racial self-identification among Latinos is how skin gradation affects experiences of racial discrimination and others' perceptions of race. Tanya Golash-Boza and William Darity, Jr. (2008) use the 1989 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS) and the Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002 National Survey of Latinos (NSL) to test the following three hypotheses. First, the *social whitening hypothesis*, which states that Latinos with a higher class status are more likely to identify as white. Second, the *identificational assimilation hypothesis*, which suggests that the more assimilated Latinos are more likely to identify as White. And, third, the *racialized assimilation hypothesis*, which claims that lighter-skinned Latinos who have not experienced discrimination are more likely to identify as White, while darker-skinned Latinos who have experienced discrimination are more likely to identify as Latino or Black.

Their analysis found that for the *social whitening* hypothesis, the respondents of the NLS with a family income of over \$50,000 and respondents with some college education were more likely to identify as white. Although this seems to support this hypothesis, their findings from the LNPS dataset were not statistically significant, thus giving mixed evidence for this hypothesis. The *identificational assimilation* hypothesis also received mixed support. Respondents of the LNPS and NLS datasets who were bilingual or only spoke English were more likely to identify as “other”. The LNPS results show that second- and third-generation respondents were more likely to identify as White. On the other hand, the NLS survey results showed that “second-generation respondents were more likely to self-identify as Hispanic than as white, and third- and later-generation respondents were more likely to self-identify as white than as other” (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008:926). The *racialization* hypothesis showed that for respondents of the LNPS, dark-skinned Latinos were more likely to self-identify as “Black” or “other” rather than as “White.” Results from the NLS showed that respondents who had experienced discrimination were more likely to self-identify as “Black,” “other” or “Hispanic.” Both datasets confirmed the racialization hypothesis that Hispanics who experience discrimination are less likely to identify as “White.”

White Identity

White identity, in a similar fashion as Hispanic/Latino identity, is a complex concept, and one that has experienced a recent resurgence of interest among sociologists. McDermott and Samson (2005) observe that scholars are starting to understand the intricacies of White racial identity and how racism and racial inequality are closely tied

to the formation and maintenance of white racial identity. Like Latino identity, the boundaries and definitions of White identity continuously change over time and space. Over the course of time, the definitions of whiteness have evolved and research has shown that this evolution is not necessarily reflexive of changes in patterns of identification, but rather they showcase the political and legal systems of racialization (Haney-Lopez 2006).

It is especially important to study White identity because as Coco Fusco (1988) noted, “Racial identities are not only black, Latino, Asian, Native Americans, and so on; they are also white... Without specifically addressing white ethnicity, there can be no critical evaluation of the construction of the other” (p.7). Furthermore, although much attention has focused on identity, much of that literature has concentrated on non-White identification, such as Black, African American, Mexican American or Hispanic (Larkey, Hecht and Martin 1993; Kibria 2000; Ruiz 1990; Salett and Koslow 1994). Taking into consideration the historical role of race, especially the role it has played in protecting White privilege and denying that same privilege to people of color, it is no surprise that most of the research on racial identity development pertains to minorities.

Although the term “White” is usually used in reference to people of European ancestry, the understandings of what White means may vary depending on community or region. Discussions regarding the appropriate terminology for Whites are reflexive of the relationship between self-identification and social context. While the U.S. census has always used the term White and is the most commonly used term today, other labels such as Caucasian, European American, and Anglo have also been used by Whites when

asked about racial identifications. Goldstein's (1999) research sampling the 1996 Current Population Survey showed that although White was the preferred nomenclature by 60% of the respondents, geographic variation showed differences in the meaning of White. For example, Goldstein's (1999) research shows that in the South, White is the preferred terminology, whereas in the Southwest and New England area Anglo is preferred. More educated respondents were more likely to prefer Caucasian and Goldstein (1999) imagines that it is a way for respondents to break away from the association to whiteness or social dominance through the adaptation of a "scientific" term.

Previous research has also identified several important characteristics of White racial identity. Most importantly, White racial identity is often invisible or taken for granted; it is rooted in social and economic privilege, and that its meaning is contextual and situational. Because of their dominant status in the United States, and because Whiteness is generally taken for granted, Whites have not had a need to think about or be aware of their own racial or ethnic identity (Mahoney 1997; McIntosh 1997). Thus, Whites generally do not define themselves through race or ethnicity, with race not being necessarily salient in their identity formation process (Gallagher 2000). Discussions of Whiteness revolve around two themes: (1) Whites becoming aware of racism and moving towards becoming anti-racists; and, (2) White supremacy and White pride which promote privilege and racism. One of the limitations of studying White supremacy and anti-racist identities is how Whites racial identity is understood in relation to how one's identity develops in relation to or in response to the oppressive dominant society.

Of the research that has been conducted about Whiteness, probably the most known is the work of Peggy McIntosh (1997), which claims that White Americans have little racial awareness of or consciousness about themselves. This claim usually roots from psychoanalytic work or from the symbolic identity theories, both of which “rest on an assumed logic of racial difference (‘our’ Whiteness is somehow different from ‘their’ non-Whiteness)” (Hartman, Gerteis and Croll 2009:406).

A second claim used in studies of whiteness revolves around White awareness and understanding of structural advantages tied to their racial status, or White privilege. Studies focusing on White privilege branch into two routes. The first branch argues that White Americans are unaware of the benefits they hold through whiteness—in other words, Whites are not aware of the realities of racial inequality. The second branch tries to go beyond awareness and looks at whether or not Whites understand racial inequalities and injustices in general and their own position in that same system (looking at the advantages they have personally experienced because of the racial hierarchy).

A third claim in studies of Whiteness takes the larger understandings of culture, incorporation, social justice and racial equality and places them on a more individual level. Color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000) stipulates that the invisibility of White identity and White privilege is supported by an individualistic and highly accepted ideology based on merit. John Hartigan (1997b) argues that studies of Whiteness demonstrate that Whites benefit from what Whites think are seemingly neutral arrangements and institutionalizations, which appear to hold no racial bias. Because of this, Whites are more likely to adhere to color-blind ideologies and

explanations of individual success, or in other words, they are more likely to believe that American society is race neutral and based on individual merit, hard work and effort as keys to success.

Hartmann, Gerteis and Croll (2009) focus on the invisibility of White identity, the understanding (or lack thereof) of racial privileges, and adherence to color-blind ideals in order to analyze Whites' awareness and conception of their own racial status. Their analysis shows that Whites are less aware of privilege than individuals from racial minorities and consistently adopt color-blind, individualistic ideologies. Their results also show that Whites are more connected to White identity and culture and are more aware of the advantages of their race than other discussions have suggested.

Martin, Krizek, Nakayama and Bradford's (1999) study of White Americans looked at how Whites prefer to self-label themselves. Their study, which surveyed 371 college students throughout the United States, found that the most preferred label was "White," followed by "Caucasian," "White American" and "European American" in that order of preference. The three least preferred labels were "Euro-Americans," "Anglo," and "WASP." They also find the following four conclusions to their study. First, the consistency in responses was particularly interesting because students were surveyed throughout the country from varying socioeconomic statuses, in various settings (cities, suburbs) and in different types of colleges and universities in the United States. Martin et al. (1999) conclude that perhaps the responses signify a universal understanding of what it means to be White. Second, similar to Gallagher's (1994) findings, Martin et al. (1999) observe that a preference for "White" and "Caucasian" labeling "indicates the

desire for universalizing the subject position—and the meaning of White” (p.44). Third, Martin et al. (1999) found a large number of non-responses and unusable answers, which they have interpreted as a resistance stemming from power and the invisibility of Whiteness. Fourth, they found that there is little difference between the preferences for labels used by Whites and those they preferred other racial and ethnic groups to use. Martin et al. (1999) find that the lack of difference in self-labeling and preferred labeling by others is also a reflection of White power.

Social psychologists who focus on defining and measuring identity have used social identity theory to treat White racial identity much like they have done to study any other dominant group identity. Scholars in this field argue that identity forms in relation to other participants in the environment and is a fluid and dynamic identity that is likely to change (Ellemers et al. 2002). Helms (1990) developed and tested several scales measuring White racial identity. She proposes a theory of stages in which Whites go through internalizing a racial identity with the final stage being a rejection of racism and an acceptance of a “nonracist core” (Helms 1990:52). Although her findings have been criticized for describing “how Whites develop different levels of sensitivity and appreciation of other racial/ethnic groups, but little about a White identity” (Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson 1994:131), Helms’ measurements of White racial identity remain one of the standard scales still used today.

Identity and Interracial Couples

Presently studies on interracial couples and their children have become more visible, particularly in the fields of sociology and psychology. The topic of interracial marriage, for example, has a lengthy history, from documenting the trajectory of interracial couples through the legal system to more complex concepts such as identity development. This section aims to examine studies that have focused on interracial couples and that include discussions of racial or ethnic identities. Much of the research about interracial couples is rooted in essentialist discussions about Blacks and Whites, especially on the deviancy of these relationships. Also, much of that research has not only been about Black-White relationships but about intermarried relationships after the 1967 Supreme Court ruling that eliminated legal restrictions on interracial marriage (e.g. Heer 1974).

According to Foeman and Nance (1999, 2002), interracial couples work through four distinct stages of a relationship in addition to undergoing the same developmental stages that other couples navigate. The four stages in the development of interracial relationships are: (1) racial awareness, (2) coping with social definitions of race, (3) identity emergence, and (4) maintenance. Racial awareness refers to the time during which individuals are attracted to each other. During this time the interracial couple develops four types of awareness— their own, the partner's, their collective racial group's, and their partner's racial group. The second stage, coping with the social definitions of race, is about learning how to incorporate the awareness learned in the first stage into their relationship. In the third stage, identity emergence, the couple redefines

their relationship's racial makeup as a positive thing. The fourth and last stage, maintenance, focuses on the strategies that have been learned by the couple in order to be successful at maintaining their relationship. Because ethnic identity is fluid and dynamic, Foeman and Nance (1999, 2002) also acknowledge that these are not precise stages that couples navigate; instead, they are flexible stages that may or may not occur.

Among research on interracial relationships, color-blindness is a recurring theme. One study conducted by St. Jean (1998) emphasizes that interracial couples characterize their relationship as “not racial” and suggest that they are a part of a color-blind society. A second study reflecting color-blindness conducted by Lewis, Yancey and Bletzer (1997) shows that nonracial factors are more important than racial factors in the spouse selection process, and hence claim that race does not matter. Lewis, Yancey and Bletzer (1997) conclude that “[t]he traditional *jungle fever* myth of Black men being attracted to the White women because of sexual and racial attractiveness is not supported by this research” (p.77). In an attempt to avoid minimizing interracial relationships to nothing more than sexual attraction, the authors make questionable assumptions, including viewing sexual and racial attractiveness as parts of the “true essence” of a person and assuming that mate selection based on these factors would be a conscious process reflected in responses to research questionnaires.

A qualitative study by Sung (1990) showed that Asian Americans married to White Americans voiced strong ethnic pride. Mok (1999) conducted a quantitative study of Asian American dating which showed that ethnic identity was a significant predictor of dating other Asian Americans, but not significant in predicting dating Whites.

Although it seems apparent that racial and/or ethnic identities are important aspects of interracial relationships there are few studies that explore the influence of these relationships on racial and ethnic identities.

Other social contexts such as perceptions of others can also play a role in the racial and/or ethnic identities of individuals in interracial relationships. Lewandowski and Jackson (2001) examined how 229 White undergraduates at a Midwestern university perceived interracial couples and their thoughts about racial prejudice. They found that the perception of interracial couples depended on the racial/gender composition of the couples. In other words, responses varied depending on which racial/ethnic groups were coupled and the gender of these partners. Their results also showed that couples were perceived as less compatible when the non-White partner was Black, but not when the non-White partner was Asian American. Additionally, the study found that White men who married interracially were perceived as having a strong racial identity and White privilege, as well as being race conscious. In contrast, men of color who married interracially were seen as “sell outs” with weak racial identities and less competent professionally (Lewandowski and Jackson 2001).

According to Felmlee and Sprecher (2000), the development of an individual's self identity is likely to vary on whether the individual is in a committed relationship. Similarly, the racial and/or ethnic identities of individuals in interracial relationships are likely to shift in different ways depending on the nature of the relationship and the influence each partner has on the other. In this way, individuals in interracial relationships may have to negotiate and reexamine their own racial and/or ethnic

identities in more ways than those individuals in same-race relationships. For example, a qualitative study by Hill and Thomas (2000) looked at how women in Black-White interracial relationships describe their racial identity. Hill and Thomas' (2000) research found that four White women and three Black men described active engagement in their racial identity development by "rejecting constraining narratives and identifying with empowering narratives" (p.196). In other words, these respondents adopted different strategies to block and transform imposed identities. In doing so, respondents reject imposed identities and generate new and empowering ones. In addition, this study found that Blacks partnered with Whites are questioned and challenged by other Blacks about their racial identity.

Foeman and Nance (1999) argue that individuals in ongoing interracial relationships develop a racial awareness or consciousness that may have been unattainable to either partner in same-race relationships. Partners gain insight about oneself, each other, and develop a worldview, especially in relation to one's race and ethnicity. Moreover, developments and shifts in identity may also vary depending on where each individual is in the process of developing his or her own racial and/or ethnic identities prior to entering their current interracial relationship, as well as other factors such as age, generational status, gender, etc.

Beyond personal relationships, the social context surrounding the interracial couple plays an important role that can influence individuals' racial and/or ethnic identities. Social networks, perceptions of others, and societal expectations, are among a

few components of social context that may influence each individual's own racial and/or ethnic identities.

Now that we have discussed research projects focusing on the fluidity of Latino identity, how White identity is static, and studies on interracial relationships, we can focus on the racialization of Latinos, in particular Mexicans, in and around distinct racial/ethnic identities situated within White contexts. To better study this racialization, this thesis is guided by theories of racial formation and symbolic interactionism, which will be discussed in the following section.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis project examines the ways in which individuals in interracial, Mexican-White relationships navigate their racial and ethnic identities. It is guided by racial formation theory and symbolic interactionism. First, racial formation is used to analyze historically situated “racial projects” which represent and organize human bodies and social structures by affirming social differences. Using Latin Americanization theory and systemic racism to examine the intricacies of racial and ethnic identification are key to this study and to racial formation. In particular, these theories are useful in making connections to larger, socially embedded structures and racial hierarchies. Second, symbolic interactionism is used to analyze the impact of the interactions between individuals in relationships on their own racial and ethnic identifications. Within symbolic interactionism, social identity theory is used to explore the connection between the socially constructed definitions attached to identities and how an individual identifies.

These theoretical perspectives view identity through different lenses, but share a common principle that identities are fluid and depend on social context for their construction. Some scholars studying racial and ethnic identities suggest that racial and ethnic identities are not fixed and unchanging, but instead are fluid and contingent upon situations or moments. They also indicate that these identities come in different forms, vary by situation, and may have different functions (Cornell and Hartmann 1997). Given the fluidity and constructions of racial and ethnic identities, situating this research in a racial formation framework and symbolic interactionism seems best suited for examining how individuals in interracial/interethnic relationships are affected by their different identities within a mostly White space.

Racial Formation

Racial formation theory developed as a response to the weaknesses of different paradigms used to study race, including assimilationism/ethnic theory and political economy theories. Robert Park's ethnicity theory became important in the 1920s with the intention of countering eugenicist arguments about race. However, Park did not include Mexicans into his study. By the late 1960s, Glazer and Moynihan argued that once Blacks and Puerto Ricans followed the same path as the White ethnics they would achieve the same level of assimilation and upward mobility (Glazer and Moynihan 1963). The implication was that the failure to do so meant an internal inability to follow the White-ethnics' example of pulling themselves "by their bootstraps." However, Glazer and Moynihan's hypotheses came during the Civil Rights/Black Power Movement, where their arguments were countered by important figures such as Stokely

Carmichael and Robert Allen, among others (Ture and Hamilton 1992; Allen 1990). Also among their critics were Nancy Denton and Douglas Massey (1993), who offered critiques of Glazer and Moynihan and of scholars presenting reductionist explanations, such as William Julius Wilson. However, Denton and Massey's (1993) work also presents some weaknesses—using Chicago as their only case study in comparing Mexicans and Blacks, their work implied that the racial marginalization of Mexicans was nowhere near as severe as that of Blacks based on the increased number of Mexican-owned businesses in Chicago and a lower segregation index. Additionally, another weakness in Denton and Massey's (1993) work is the lack of differentiation between the Mexican entrepreneurs, many of whom pass as White in Mexico, and the darker Mexican working-class, and their treatment according to social context. This is where racial formation theory becomes more useful than previous theories.

Omi and Winant's (1994) theory of racial formation emerged as a theory that attempts to grasp the complexities of racial identity, politics and social structure in the United States. Therefore, racial formation is defined as a “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 1994:55) and which is situated in historically structured projects. Omi and Winant (1994) attempt to chart a middle course between two extremes. The first is an essentialist ideology that views race as “a matter of innate characteristics, of which skin color and other physical attributes provide only the most obvious, and in some respects most superficial, indicators” (Omi and Winant 1994:64). The other extreme is the view

that trivializes race, claiming that since it is a social construction, race will disappear if we just ignore it.

Key to Omi and Winant's (1994) construction of race is the concept of a "racial project." Racial projects make the links between social structure and cultural representations, or connecting what race "means" and the ways in which social structures and everyday experiences are organized based on that meaning. According to Omi and Winant (1994), a racial project "is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (p.56). Therefore, racial projects are instrumental to creating and reproducing hierarchical structures of domination based on essentialist race (Omi and Winant 1994). Racial formation and racial projects are considered in terms of macro-social scale, national social processes and movements, as well as on the micro-social level or the ways in which everyday experiences are racially organized. I apply the theory of racial formation at the micro level, looking at the contributions of individuals in interracial relationships to the formation of their identities as well as those of their partners. Additionally, racial formation understands micro-level utterances as reflections, incorporations, and re-workings of racial projects at the macro level. Thus, the relationship between these two levels is dynamic, in which individuals articulate racial projects with the cultural and material resources available to them in the larger social context from which the racial projects originate. Alternatively, as individuals draw on and rework racial projects at the micro level, they simultaneously contribute to shifts in articulations and understandings at the macro level as well.

However, to understand both the macro-social and micro-social levels of racial organization it is important to discuss the systems of racialization in the United States. Thus, the following sections will discuss the institutionalization of racism and how Mexicans fit into the racial hierarchies. Racism in the United States is systemic and over generations racist practices have become embedded in institutions like the educational system, churches, families, and the economy, among others (Bonilla-Silva 1996). The ramifications of racist structures are felt by people of color in their everyday lives through human interaction (Bonilla-Silva 1996; Feagin and Feagin 2007) and can affect their identities (Omi and Winant 1994), attitudes (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000), and actions (Essed 1991). The racist structure is legitimized by a racist ideology where individuals are socialized in such a way that the differential treatment of people of color becomes normalized and expected. Racism is hegemonic so it often appears invisible. Knowingly or unknowingly participating in racist practices reinforces the hierarchies of racism.

As Feagin (2000, 2006) describes, systemic racism has shaped and continues to dominate social institutions and life in the United States. Systemic racism “encompasses a broad range of racialized dimensions of this society: the racist framing, racist ideology, stereotyped attitudes, racist emotions, discriminatory habits and actions, and extensive racist institutions developed over centuries by whites” (Feagin 2000:xii). A crucial aspect of Feagin’s (2006) theory of systemic racism is the white racial frame, a system that has been propagated and held by most White Americans and in part has been accepted by many people of color where Whites create a framework used to interpret

and rationalize the hierarchical oppression of people of color (Feagin 2006, 2009). This framework includes racial images, interpretations, emotions, and actions closely tied to racial cognitions and understandings (Feagin 2000). In general, the white racial frame views people of color as generally of less social, economic, and political status compared to Whites who are seen as superior in culture and achievement. On another level, the white racial frame also views the control of social institutions to be in the hands of Whites, but simultaneously fails to recognize the unjust enrichment and disproportionate privilege accompanying that control. Lastly, the white racial frame generally goes unquestioned and unchallenged in a tacit acceptance by Whites. Therefore, the white racial frame not only portrays people of color negatively, but reinforces positive representations of Whites and whiteness.

Racial stratification in general in the United States has been bi-racial (White and non-White) for centuries, and, in particular, Black-White (Feagin 2000). However, Latinos, and in particular Mexicans, have a long history of racialization in the United States which roots back to Spanish colonization. During colonization in Latin America, the Spanish invented racial categories after coming in contact with the Amerindian people, transporting enslaved Africans to the Americas, and both witnessing and engaging in miscegenation between them (Cox 1970; Menchaca 2002). Constructing different racial categories served both economic purposes and to ensure social control of the colonies, including sanctioning and extending privilege when necessary. The legal construction of race invented by the Spaniards in the Americas eventually gave way to

an informal one, where some *mestizos*³ in northern Mexico claimed whiteness and passed as “White” (Gutierrez 1991).

Within the context of the United States, the origins of Mexicans being classified as “White” can be traced to two seminal moments: the 1790 naturalization law which stated that only Whites could be citizens; and, the Mexican-American War, which granted citizenship to all Mexicans in the ceded territories. Therefore, if only Whites could be citizens, then Mexicans needed to be formally recognized as White. However, this was tested in 1897 when Ricardo Rodríguez, a dark-skinned Mexican man applied for naturalization. Although Rodríguez appeared indigenous, as long as he testified that he was not “Indian” he was eligible for citizenship under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and would be guaranteed “the privileges of Whites” while not violating the “racial clauses of the naturalization laws” (Menchaca 2002:284).

The term “Mexican” itself has changed over time and space. In the mid-nineteenth century it was used by Whites to identify *hispano* elites of the Southwest and people residing below the present-day boundary between the United States and Mexico. However, the term did not include “Indians,” which could include darker *mestizos* if compared to a larger White population and who were treated differently. The elites of what is now the U.S. Southwest, however, did not identify as “Mexicans” but rather with reference to their states of residences, as *californios*, *tejanos*, and *nuevomexicanos* (Gutierrez 1994; Resendez 2005; Sanchez 1995; Haas 1995).

³ *Mestizo* refers to someone of mixed blood, specifically a person of mixed European and American Indian ancestry.

Although Mexicans in the United States were already becoming racialized in the mid-nineteenth century as a means of justifying territorial annexation, the only national legal acknowledgement of this racial construction was not implemented until 1930 when the U.S. census first—and for the only time ever--established a “Mexican” category (Rodriguez 2000; Lee 1993; Goldberg 1997). In the nineteenth century, expansion across the continent exposed groups who were previously not part of the racial discourse, such as Mexicans and Chinese. Much of the discourse into the mid-nineteenth century then emerged out of the debates on slavery and “the Indian question” (Saxton 2003:295). Therefore, the existing discourse on Blacks and Native Americans was applied to Mexicans and Chinese. De Leon (1983) summarizes this association by stating that, “The black component could be detected, and allusions to the ‘half-Negro, half-Indian greaser’ and Mexicans of ‘mixed Indian and African blood’ were not absent from the literature of the era” (p.15). Thus, the way in which people of color get classified as “White,” as in the case of Mexicans, shows that racialization/racial formation does not have to be official.

Mexicans, like other people of color in the U.S., have also been racialized in their daily lives, as the victims of lynching, poverty, discrimination, and super-exploitation. They serve as proof that one does not have to be considered another “race” to be made into the “Other.” Racial formation theorists who primarily rely on formal racial categories in addressing Latinos in general show contradictions in their arguments. For example, Matthew Jacobson (2002) implies that the racialization of Mexicans only occurred in limited instances and not consistently:

The “degenerate Mexicans” of 1840s imagery might become honorary “Caucasians” in the context of school segregation later in the century, only to be reinscribed as a dangerously shiftless and unassimilable element when Pancho Villa rides (or when intolerance of undocumented immigrants mounts in Pete Wilson’s California) (p.142).

Jacobson does not use the term “honorary ‘Caucasian’” to classify eastern and southern European immigrants. However, the misconception of Mexicans as “White” does not end there, even within critical race theory. While Jacobson allows for the possibility of Mexicans being non-White, Stuart Hall assumes Mexicans can only be “White” without allowing for even the possibility of conditional non-Whiteness (Hall 2002).

On the other hand, Bonilla-Silva (2002) argues that the Civil Rights movement brought with it changes in racial stratification. For example, the rate of interracial dating and marriage, particularly between Latinos and Whites and Asians and Whites (Moran 2001; Qian and Lichter 2000), has increased. Bonilla-Silva’s (2002) Latin Americanization theory suggests that the United States is no longer bi-racially stratified, but rather is shifting into a tri-racial system much like that found in Latin American and Caribbean nations (Bonilla Silva 2004). In this tri-racial system, the three groups comprising it are “Whites” at the top, “honorary Whites” in the middle and a non-White group or “collective Black” at the bottom (Bonilla-Silva 2002). According to Bonilla-Silva (2002), there are several reasons why it is possible for the system to become tri-racial. First, the demography of the United States has changed where racial minorities make up 30% of the population and it is projected that by 2050 minorities will become the numeric majority. With the darkening of the population, Bonilla-Silva (2002) also argues that this tri-racial system may be emerging in order to enable the retention of

White power by creating an intermediate racial group to buffer racial conflicts. This intermediate group would incorporate some of the newcomers into the White racial strata while also incorporating most immigrants into the collective Black strata.

Second, according to Bonilla-Silva (2002) and Smith (1995), the post-civil rights era created a new White supremacy, which Bonilla-Silva labels as “new racism”. This “new racism” retains systems which promote racial discrimination in a much more covert and seemingly non-racial manner. This “kinder and gentler” form has also produced color-blind racism, which “denies the salience of race, scorns those who talk about race, and increasingly proclaims that ‘We are all Americans’” (Bonilla-Silva 2002:6).

Third, the foreign and “dark” workforce has become increasingly globalized, and with this globalization the European nations employing minorities in their workforce have developed an internal “racial structure” to help maintain White power and create an underclass (Bonilla-Silva 2002).

Fourth, conservative political ideologies and actions vis-à-vis the multi-racial movement have created working spaces for the transformation of the way we gather racial data in the United States.

Lastly, what Steinberg (1995) has identified as the “racial retreat” or the attack on affirmative action, signals the end of race-based social policy in the U.S. If race-based social policy is eliminated, indicating that race no longer affects minorities’ status, the U.S. may maintain or even increase the levels of racial inequality. Adopting color-blind ideologies such as that of the racial retreat ignores how salient race is in all of our

social structures. The end of race-based social policy, therefore, would have major implications for all minorities and especially for Latinos who flow in and out of *de jure* and *de facto* racialized identities.

With this in mind, Bonilla-Silva hypothesizes that the “White” group will include “traditional” Whites, new “White” immigrants, and sometime in the future, assimilated Latinos, some multiracials, as well as, other subgroups. “Honorary Whites” will be made up of mostly light-skinned Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese Americans, and most Middle Eastern Americans. Finally, “Collective Blacks” will include Blacks, dark-skinned Latinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and perhaps Filipinos (Bonilla-Silva 2002).

Although Bonilla-Silva (2002) claims that this tri-racial system emerged after the civil rights movement, other scholars such as Murguia and Saenz (2002) believe that this tri-racial stratification has always existed in the United States. For example, at the time of colonization, the U.S. consisted of English Whites at the top, White indentured servants in the middle, and Native Americans, and later, Black slaves, at the bottom. Now, the only change in the three-tier system is that all European Whites, regardless of country of origin, are at the top, middle-class Asians and Latinos are in the second-tier, and the working and lower class people of color are at the bottom rung. Murguia and Saenz (2002) clarify that the only difference in the racial system is that the hierarchy went from White-White-Black to White-Brown-Black. Murguia and Saenz (2002) also emphasize social class standing in their critique of Bonilla-Silva’s Latin Americanization theory. In particular they state that members of every racial group will

eventually experience all tiers and use the example of poor Appalachian Whites who will remain at the bottom despite their origin and skin color.

The results for Bonilla-Silva's (2002) theory reflect the serious limits to his data, including, insufficient data on Latinos and Asians. Despite these limitations, important information arose from this study, such as indications of an emergence of an internal stratification among racial minorities. This internal stratification has "led some minorities to develop racial attitudes similar to those of Whites, and others to develop attitudes closer to those of Blacks" (Bonilla-Silva 2002:11). An important component of this study is being able to gauge whether individuals in interracial relationships experience this internal stratification among minorities, as well as, among Whites. Another component of this study examines how racialized social systems are perceived by both minorities and Whites in relationships and where Latinas/os fit into that system.

The formal racialization of Latinos is another gap in both racial formation theory and in studies focusing on Latinos. For example, Mexicans in the United States, who span the full range of skin tones, have been classified as "White" despite their *de facto* treatment as non-White. This is important for the following reasons. First, Mexicans in the United States have been treated as racially homogenous. In other words, light-skinned individuals are considered to have the same lived experiences as dark-skinned individuals. And second, by continuously shifting the racial categories of Mexicans back and forth between White and non-White, Mexicans are further subjugated by denying them equal protection under the law (Haney-Lopez 2003).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism, first introduced by the teachings of Mead (1934), and developed further by Blumer (1969, 1986), initially analyzed identity formation at a microsociological level that focused on the conceptions of self as it undergoes development and modification through social processes. Symbolic interactionism is based on three premises. According to Blumer (1969, 1986), first, “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that they have for them” (p.2). These things include physical objects, other human beings, institutions, ideals, activities of others, and daily situations a person may encounter. Second, meanings are created through social interaction. Third, these meanings change through interaction with others. Blumer (1969, 1986) claimed that people interact with each other by interpreting and defining each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to each other’s actions. These interpretations and definitions do not arise directly from the actions of another but instead are based on the meanings attached to those actions. These three premises are concerned with meaning, language and thought (Griffin 1997), which are also negotiated within and between cultures and the spaces that impact identity. In this way, symbolic interactionism proposes that identities are the products of ongoing dialogues between mind, self, and society (Mead 1934).

From Blumer’s (1969, 1986) interactionist perspective come four major implications for qualitative research: (1) respecting the essence of the subject matter, (2) achieving familiarity with the interaction being studied, (3) developing concepts sensitive to subject which then leads to comparison and contrasts, and, (4) understanding

the process of interactions (Prus 1996). According to Prus (1996), the researcher should be aware of the subjectivity of human behavior; the viewpoints of the actors involved in the situation; the interpretations that the actors attach to themselves, other people and other objects they interact with; the ways in which the actors do things on both individual and interactive levels; the attempts the actors make to influence, as well as, accommodate and resist the inputs and behaviors of others; the bonds the actors develop over time and how they maintain these bonds; and, the process of interaction that the actors develop and experience over time.

Within the symbolic interactionist perspective, identity refers to

a validated self-understanding that situates and defines an individual or, as Gregory Stone suggest, establishes what and where an actor is in social terms. Identity development is a process in which individuals understand themselves and others, as well as evaluate their self in relation to others (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008:20).

Identities, because they are fluid and dynamic, depend upon confirmation from others to be developed and maintained. While some validations and confirmations may be more significant than others, all individuals require some sort of validation, in particular by the people that are most important to them (Berger and Kellner 1979). Similarly, for this study, I seek to explore if and how interracial couples validate and confirm each other's identities within their interpersonal, romantic relationships. And, precisely because of this, symbolic interactionism is well suited for this particular research study—by looking at how couples affirm or negate their identities within the context of their physical location, relationship and social network, the researcher can determine specifically *what* within those contexts has or has not led to any changes in identity development in

interracial couples. Symbolic interactionism maintains that self-identity is formed and transformed through on-going dialogue with members of one's socio-cultural environment. Given that the socio-cultural environment in the case of interracial couples for this study is their relationship environment, and that the couples have been together for more than three years, the relationship culture is a strong influence. Therefore, studying the couple's symbolic interaction is important as it relates to the construction, co-construction and de-construction of identity.

This research project also incorporates the use of social identity theory (Tajfel 1981; Stryker 1986) in order to explain the connection between socially constructed definitions of identities and how individuals identify. According to Owens (2003), social identity theory originally set out as a more social approach to understanding group interactions instead of the individualistic explanations usually set forth within psychology (Thoits and Virshup 1997). Social identity theory suggests that "individuals are motivated to achieve a positive 'social identity,' defined as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group... together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'" (Taylor and Moghaddam 1994:61).

Social identity theory focuses on two parts: the individual self and the collective self. The personal self consists of personal characteristics, close relationships and personal attributes. The collective self, on the other hand, looks at that part of an individual that draws on commonalities among social groups to define oneself. At the base of social identity theory is the process of self-categorization, which looks at the

ways in which individuals look at the world and divide it into people “like them” and “unlike them.” This categorization is not blind. For example, Cornell and Hartman (1997), among other researchers, have emphasized that individuals will self-identify differently depending on context (Harris and Sim 2002) and their stage in the life course (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). Cornell and Hartmann (1997) focus on issues that arise from the interaction of internal and external processes of identification and argue that,

Ethnicity and race are not simply labels forced upon people. They are also identities that people accept, resist, choose, specify, invent, redefine, reject, actively defend, and so forth. They involve an active “we” as well as a “they.” They involve not only circumstances but active responses to circumstances by individuals and groups, guided by their own preconceptions, dispositions, and agendas (p.77).

An important factor in determining how a group defines itself is the degree to which that group has been racialized. Stephan and Stephan (2000) find that for the purposes of racial and ethnic identification, a system based on self-identification is the most appropriate one. The importance of studying race and ethnicity is to understand how people self-categorize and how this is reflexive of larger systems, in this case, of racialized social systems (Bonilla-Silva 1996), which refers to “societies in which economic, political, social and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races” (p.469).

Despite the growing research in these areas, questions of how Whites and their race-based ideologies influence or affect the identities of their partners in amorous, interpersonal relationships are still ambiguous, especially as they pertain to Latina/os. In particular, questions regarding the influence of Whites and whiteness on the formation of

racial identities among their Mexican partners are of importance. Additionally, this research project examines the ways in which non-White racial identities are validated and confirmed among individuals in these relationships, how group membership affects racial/ethnic identification, and the meanings or definitions attached to racial/ethnic identities.

As has been shown, identity is very complex and changes according to a variety of factors. By using racial formation as a guiding framework, this research aims to examine the contributions of individuals to the formation of identities as individuals draw on and rework existing racial structures in their lives. Furthermore, Latin Americanization theory, systemic racism and the White racial frame contribute to examining the existing racial structure, including the position of Latinos in the context of the U.S. and the propagation of beliefs about racial and ethnic groups.

Symbolic interactionism allows us to establish a micro-level analysis of how individuals view themselves and how interacting with their partners has affected parts of their identification. Symbolic interactionism provides a framework used to understand that identities are on-going dialogues between mind, self and society. Furthermore, these dialogues validate or confirm identities and those identities can change. This research focuses on how individuals self-identify and how they are perceived by their partners. Therefore, studying this on-going dialogue with members of socio-cultural environment is key to the retention, reproduction and creation of identities, including the perceptions of the dialogues themselves and the internal dialogues extended from these interactions.

Therefore, in this thesis, I draw from different topics to examine the effects of being in an interracial relationship on the creation, retention and production of identity within individuals. Specifically this thesis examines how individuals self-identify, how they are perceived by their partners and how that perception is imposed, and the impact of that imposition on their self-identification.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The research questions proposed in the previous chapter will be addressed through data collected from in-depth interviews from this qualitative study. This thesis is the product of a research project set in Brazos County, Texas. The state of Texas was chosen for this study for a couple of reasons. First, Texas is the second largest state in the country in population. And, second, it is also the largest state with respect to the Mexican-origin population. Brazos County was specifically chosen because it is a small to medium size metro area where Whites represent the majority.

Given my own experience as a child of a Mexican-White interracial marriage, I became interested in the study of race and ethnicity, especially when focused on identity. Having migrated to the United States as a young adult seeking a college education, I became aware of how my own identity was perceived as people inquired about my hometown and family. It is through these personal experiences that I was able to conclude that identity is complex and needs further researching.

METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

While quantitative research has compiled crucial data with regards to interracial relationships, it has shortcomings in that it biases the researcher to enter the field with predetermined categories. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, use inductive methods that recognize the importance of all types of information without filtering it

through predetermined categories. Also, qualitative methods can be used “to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively” (Hoepfl 1997:49).

Qualitative methods are used for this research because of their nature in not only seeking answers to *what*, *where*, and *when* questions, but also inquiring about the *whys* and *how's* of a particular research project (Fontana and Frey 2005; Gubrium and Holstein 2001). Qualitative research tends to be characterized by purposive sampling. That is, subjects are selected because of a particular characteristic or set of characteristics, which makes this type of method ideal for this research project. Additionally, qualitative methods have a theoretical foundation that emphasizes the distinctive quality of life experiences, the context, creation and production of meaning, and the interactions between humans (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Qualitative data methodology has extensively been used in order to gain knowledge from informants with Kvale (1996) arguing that “developing an interview as a research method involves a challenge to renew, broaden and enrich the conceptions of knowledge and research in the social sciences” (p.10).

Specifically, this project aims to use the grounded theory (GT) method, originally created to assist theory construction in ways that other methods may not (Glaser 1978, 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987). Grounded theory's inductive theory discovery methodology allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a specific topic while concurrently grounding the account in empirical observations or data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Because grounded theory seeks to derive categories from close, sustained and systematic reviews of data, data

analysis must be comprehensive of every detail to really showcase everything relating to and beyond the data (Strauss 1987). Grounded theory does not seek to establish relationships between key variables prior to research, but, instead, is a procedure used for generating and elaborating theoretical propositions through a close examination of data (Emerson 2001). What differentiates the work of a grounded theorist from that of an ethnographer is that the grounded theorist “is an active sampler of theoretically relevant data, not an ethnographer trying to get the fullest data on a group” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:58).

Grounded theory is appropriate for this research project because this approach serves to generate both rich descriptions (Geertz 1973) and categorized conceptualizations of the challenges that interracial couples encounter in their relationships and among their peers. Also, when using grounded theory as a method for the generation of theory, the kind of evidence and the number of cases take a backseat to the development of conceptual categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The primary data comes from in-depth interviews with Mexican-White couples in Brazos County, Texas. This method was chosen with the expectation that it would not only yield the richest information regarding issues of identity, but also because in-depth interviews vividly illustrate the contextual process of ascribing and negotiating social meaning (Gubrium and Holstein 2001; Lofland and Lofland 1995). Interviewing was suited for this project because it covers the *how*’s of people’s lives and the *what*’s of people’s actions (Fontana and Frey 2005; Gallagher 2000; Gubrium and Holstein 2001;

Kvale 1996). The in-depth interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, resembling a “guided conversation” (Kvale 1996).

SAMPLING AND RECRUITMENT

For this study, participant selection followed the snowball method of interviewing, where a sample of people is drawn from a given population (Goodman 1961). Existing study subjects were used to recruit further subjects from among their social networks. The first couple fulfilling the criteria was contacted via personal social networks. If they agreed to participate, that couple would be asked if they knew of any other couples who fulfill criteria and who might be willing to participate in research. Those couples were then contacted and asked to participate in the study. Initially, this project was set to only look at interracial married couples, as the recruitment process using snowball method within my own network proved to be much more difficult than anticipated, I found it better to seek out couples in interracial relationships that fit the same criteria initially stipulated (minus the marriage component), plus some additional stipulations (length of relationship).

When I first planned this research project, the expectation was that each couple interviewed would be able to provide the names of at least one other couple who fulfilled the criteria and who would be willing to participate in the research project. However, it became apparent early in the recruitment process that I had overestimated how extensive my own social network was with regards to knowing Mexican-White married couples in the Brazos County area. As such, it was in the project’s best interest to seek out people in relationships that fulfilled the criteria. Even with the change in criteria, participant

recruitment was not as quick as it had initially been anticipated. Every time I asked an interviewee for a contact, they would either give me one name or no name at all.

As predicted in my thesis proposal, using snowball sampling had its advantages and disadvantages. One advantage was that it allowed access to a specific population, in this case, that of Mexican-White couples living in Brazos County, Texas, who were willing to discuss their lifestyles, affiliations, and sensitive topics in relation to their racial and ethnic identities. Another advantage of snowball sampling was its use of interpersonal relationship and connections between people. This feature is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It proves to be an advantage in that it reflects and says something about the interconnectedness of research participants in the community. It shows to be a disadvantage in that these networks become homogenous; instead of reflecting variety in socioeconomic statuses, the sample proved to be mostly middle class as determined by levels of education and income.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

My final sample consisted of ten married Mexican-White couples and ten Mexican-White couples in relationships. A total of forty interviews were conducted with twenty couples—interviews were conducted with individuals rather than with couples to enable comfort among respondents, as well as to guarantee that partners will not influence each others responses. The interviews took place usually in the interviewees' home or in quiet public areas such as parks. In most cases (except one), the respondent and myself were the only people present at the time of the interview. Each interview lasted between one hour and two hours and the interviews were audio

taped when consent was given. The interviewees received \$15 per couple following the completion of both interviews, and all participants were allowed to withdraw their participation from the study at any time. In order to ensure confidentiality, respondents' names were changed and the interviews and notes are being kept in a secured file held by the principal investigator for three years. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, but with some respondents feeling more comfortable speaking Spanish, as a Spanish speaker I was able to cater to that need.

I encountered a few problems in conducting my research. First, as aforementioned, recruitment was slower and more difficult than had been originally anticipated, which led to minor parts of the recruitment criteria being altered. Second, nine of the forty participants refused to be audio-taped, which was not ideal for data collection for fear of losing information.

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

Because of the qualitative nature of my research, this study consisted of forty semi-structured interviews (twenty couples). The interviews were organized with questions set in increasing order of sensitivity in order to establish rapport with the interviewee. The first section discusses family and upbringing as a form of not only gaining rapport through childhood stories, but also as a way of gaining insight into what that respondent's family structure was like in the past and how that has been influential in that individual's current relationship. This section also includes questions about language, gastronomy, holidays and religious activities in order to establish ethnic affiliation. Lastly, this section discusses the interviewee's experiences with racism,

including discussions with family and friends with regards to discussions of race, racism during school, and the respondent's racial and ethnic self-identifications.

The second section includes questions specific to that individual's relationship with their significant other. First, interviewees were asked background questions about how and when they met their significant other. Second, interviewees were asked about their family's reaction to their significant other and their relationship with that partner. And, third, similar questions to those in the family and upbringing section were asked to draw a parallel between upbringing experiences and current practices. This section was established as a way of evaluating any changes in cultural practices and ideologies.

The third section includes questions about how interviewees identify themselves, their partners, and if applicable, their children, with regards to race and ethnicity in order to evaluate how respondents perceive and/or impose identities on individuals who are part of their life.

The fourth section includes demographic questions tapping the following questions:

- Personal income
- Household income
- Education completed
- Occupation
- Racial identification using Census categories
- Mother's education and occupation
- Father's education and occupation

Finally, field notes were developed through the collection of data to allow for the recognition of factors not previously considered and which might uncover and yield important issues. For complete questionnaire, see Appendix A.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

The previous chapter described the data and methods used to examine the racial and ethnic identities of individuals in interracial and interethnic relationships in a predominantly White space. Specifically, this project is interested in how interactions between these individuals narrate their experiences within close, interpersonal relationships in a specific context and reflect micro- and macro-sociological systems. This chapter provides a discussion of the findings associated with the analysis. First, I will provide an overview of the twenty participating couples, including where they are from, educational attainment levels, current occupations, how they met their partners, and whether they are cohabitating. Second, I will show how identity is dynamic, contextual and situational for non-White partners. Third, I will examine how White identity does not shift in the context of interracial relationships. Fourth, I will discuss how Whites impose the identity “Hispanic” on their Mexican partners because it is a non-threatening label, identity and image. Finally, I will return to my research question of whether interracial relationships affect the racial and/or ethnic identities of individuals in these relationships.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE SAMPLE COUPLES

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the data for this thesis came from open-ended, in-depth interviews with 20 couples, interviewed individually, about racial and ethnic identities. In interviewing these couples, mini-biographies were created to

include background and demographic information. The following section presents this information.

In order to better understand the various findings from the interviews, it is important to become familiar with who the participants are and learn about their relationships. Background information on the participants provides a contextual framework that aids in understanding their narratives as they relate to their racial and ethnic identities. Table 1 shows basic biographical information by respondent, including their ages, racial self-identification, area of origin, educational attainment, and occupation. As shown, 36 out of the 40 respondents, including all the White respondents, are from the United States. The remaining four are originally from different locations in Mexico and at some point in their lives migrated to the United States. The majority of both male and female participants spent most of their lives in Texas. Megan, Ann, Kevin, Erin, Mateo, William, Zach and Sean grew up outside of Texas and their experiences may reflect different perspectives from the rest of the participants. Almost half (45 percent) of the individuals—both in interracial relationships and marriages—were from predominantly White neighborhoods throughout the United States, while nearly 38 percent were from predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods, and almost 18 percent were from racially mixed neighborhoods.

Racial self-identification also varies significantly—of the 20 Mexican respondents, 12 identified as “Hispanic,” four identified as “Mexican”, three identified as “Mexican American”, and one identified as “Latino”. Of the 20 White respondents, 19 identified as White and one identified as European/Anglo.

Table 1. Basic biographical information by respondent

Name	Age	Self-Identified Racial Label	Area of origin	Education	Occupation
Brenda	21	White	Southeast, TX	Some college	Food service
Josh	22	Hispanic	Southeast, TX	High school	Construction
Daniela	28	Hispanic	Southeast, TX	High school	Customer Service
Jason	30	White	Southeast, TX	Bachelors	
Deborah	34	White	Northeast, TX	Bachelors	Business owner
Gerardo	36	Hispanic	Southeast, TX	Masters	Business owner
Erica	35	Mexican	North Central Mexico	None	Housewife
John	65	White	Southeast, TX	High school	Construction
Jennifer	24	White	Northeast, CO	Some college	Student
Fernando	26	Mexican	South, TX	Bachelors	Student
Judith	23	Hispanic	Southeast, TX	Bachelors	Student
Mark	23	White	Northeast, TX	Bachelors	Student
Lorrie	24	White	West, TX	Bachelors	Entertainment
Cristobal	35	Hispanic	South, TX	Bachelors	Entertainment
Megan	28	White	East Central, MO	Bachelors	Administrative assistant
Jaime	28	Latino	South, TX	Masters	Student
Stefanie	28	Mexican	Central Mexico	Bachelors	Student
James	36	White	Southeast, TX	High school	Information technology
Victoria	25	Mexican	South, TX	Some college	Student
Arthur	30	White	Southeast, TX	High school	Telecommunications
Ann	42	White	Southeast, LA	Bachelors	Health
Jorge	44	Hispanic	Southeast, TX	High school	Maintenance
Carla	58	Mexican American	Southeast, TX	Bachelors	Education
Gary	60	White	Central, TX	High school	Telecommunications

Table 1. Continued

Name	Age	Self-identified Racial Label	Area of origin	Education	Occupation
Elizabeth	73	Hispanic	Southeast, TX	High school	Retired
Kevin	73	White	East Central, IA	Associates	Retired
Erin	28	White	Northeast, IL	Bachelors	Retail/Food service
Mateo	29	Hispanic	South, FL	Bachelors	Student
Irene	29	Mexican American	North Mexico/Southwest TX	Bachelors	Art/Media
William	36	White	East Central, RI	Masters	Student
Margarita	35	Hispanic	Southwest, TX	Bachelors	Business owner
Matthew	39	White	Northwest, SC	Bachelors	Business owner
Mariana	32	Hispanic	South, TX	Bachelors	Student
Zach	33	European/Anglo	Northwest, CA	Bachelors	Student
Sofia	30	Hispanic	South, TX	PhD	Statistician
Sean	41	White	Northwest, OR	PhD	Researcher
Vanessa	39	Mexican American	Southeast, TX	Bachelors	Education
Chris	43	White	Southeast, TX	PhD	Education
Veronica	27	Hispanic	Southwest, TX	Bachelors	Student/Stay-at-home Mom
Jacob	34	White	Southeast, TX	High school	Entertainment

With regards to education, of the 40 respondents, three have earned PhDs, three have earned Masters degrees, 20 have earned Bachelors degrees, one has an Associates degree, three have taken some college courses, nine have completed their high school education, and one has no formal education.

The type of occupation each respondent had also varies across the board from retail, food services, construction, housewife, retired, telecommunications and an overwhelming number of students (11 out of 40 respondents were students at varying levels).

The basic demographic information compiled reveals the following overall look at the age ranges, and personal and household incomes: The majority of respondents (42.5 percent) are in the 18 to 29 year old range, followed by 35 percent who are in the 30 to 39 year old range, 10 percent who are in the 40 to 49 range, 5 percent who are in the 50 to 64 range, and 7.5 percent who are 65 or older.

Incomes for the respondents also showed variety across different ranges with the majority (30 percent) of respondents personally earning between \$20,001 and \$30,000. Personal incomes also reflect that the majority of respondents overwhelmingly make between \$0 and \$40,000 (72.5 percent), while very few make over \$40,001 (27.5 percent). According to the U.S. Census (2005), the overall median income for individuals over the age of 18 in the United States is \$25,149. In contrast, the combined household incomes reflect a large percentage of couples collectively earning between \$40,001-50,000 (at 32.5 percent) and over \$90,001 (25 percent). Household income also

shows that the lowest income per household lies in the \$30,001-\$40,000 range. In 2004, according to the U.S. Census (2005), the median household income in the U.S. was \$44,389.

Table 2 shows the basic relationship information by respondent, including marital status, length of relationship, how they met their partner, whether they had experienced interracial relationships before, whether they had children from the current relationship, if they had previously married, and if any children were born from previous relationships. This data reflect that 50 percent of respondents were married while the other 50 percent were in relationships of over three years. Also, couples met in a variety of ways, including through mutual friends, at local events, at parties, at work and on the Internet. Seven of the twenty couples had children from their current relationship (35%) and four had children from previous relationships/marriages (20%). Also, of the 40 respondents, 21 experienced interracial amorous relationships prior to their current relationship.

This section attempted to provide the reader with a general overview of the characteristics of the sample groups. Through this exploration, we found that respondents vary in ages, levels of education, income, experiences with interracial relationships, and length of current relationship. The following sections will examine the narratives of respondents within the three outlined themes: Mexican respondents' self-identification as dynamic and fluid; the static nature of White respondents' self-identification; and, how Whites impose "Hispanic" as an identity on their partners.

Table 2. Basic relationship information by respondent

Respondent	Married?	Length of relationship (in years)	How they met	Previous interracial relationships?	Children from this relationship?	Previously married?	Children from previous relationship?
Brenda Josh	No	3+	At a friend's party	Yes No	No	No No	Yes No
Daniela Jason	No	6	At her job	No Yes	No	No No	No No
Deborah Gerardo	No	7	They were working together	No Yes	No	No No	No No
Erica John	No	5	They were neighbors	No No	No	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Jennifer Fernando	No	4	At a fair; through mutual friends	Yes No	Yes	No No	No No
Judith Mark	No	3	Through a mutual friend	Yes No	No	No No	No No
Lorrie Cristobal	No	3	At a party	No Yes	No	No No	No No
Megan Jaime	No	5	At her job	No Yes	No	No No	No No
Stefanie James	No	4	Online	Yes No	No	No No	No No
Victoria Arthur	No	5	Through a mutual friend	Yes Yes	No	No No	Yes No

Table 2. Continued

Respondent	Married?	Length of relationship (in years)	How they met	Previous interracial relationships?	Children from this relationship?	Previously married?	Children from previous relationships?
Ann Jorge	Yes	6	At a sporting event	No Yes	No No	No Yes	No Yes
Carla Gary	Yes	26	Through mutual friends	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
Elizabeth Kevin	Yes	54	On the street	Yes Yes	Yes Yes	No No	No No
Erin Mateo	Yes	6	At a local event	No Yes	No No	No No	No No
Irene William	Yes	5	At a bar	Yes No	No No	No No	No No
Margarita Matthew	Yes	23	Through a mutual friend and colleague	No No	No Yes	No No	No No
Mariana Zach	Yes	5	Online	Yes Yes	No No	No No	No No
Sofia Sean	Yes	6	At a party	Yes No	Yes Yes	No Yes	No Yes
Vanessa Chris	Yes	6	Through mutual friends	Yes No	Yes No	No No	No No
Veronica Jacob	Yes	4	Music industry event	Yes Yes	Yes Yes	No No	No No

RESULTS

An examination of the literature discloses that few studies have examined the impact of being in an interracial relationship on an individual's racial and/or ethnic identity. Even fewer studies have focused on how Whites impose identities on non-Whites, especially in the context of amorous relationships. Furthermore, the literature that focuses on White identity poses that White identity also shifts but their results only show changes in attitudes and beliefs about whiteness, in particular racial awareness and White supremacy. However, as this analysis will show, interracial relationships affect the identity of Mexicans, Whites impose identities onto their non-White partners, and the racial identity of Whites does not change. Findings from this study show that racial and ethnic identities are complicated constructs with multiple meanings. The study also indicates that racial and ethnic identities are highly contextual, complex and multi-layered.

The following sections describe how participants speak about their racial and ethnic identities in the context of their upbringing, as well as in their interaction with their partners. These narratives reflect commentaries about their families, their relationships, self-identification, racism and a larger narrative of their own placements in a larger world structure. Overall, the results of this study echo the social constructionist understanding of racial and ethnic identity development as a dynamic and fluid process across multiple contexts where individuals integrate and negotiate multiple realities (Ashmore and Jussim 1997; Hershel 1995). These sections also offer a link toward understanding how racial formation processes operate in amorous relationships, by

highlighting how people do racialization. To conduct this analysis, I will begin by discussing how Mexican respondents identified themselves racially, including their own definitions of “race” and “ethnicity.”

Mexican Self-identification

In this study I was first interested in how the non-White respondents self-identified racially. When asked how they self-identified, several respondents expressed confusion about the different definitions of race and ethnicity. To help them respond to the question of their self-identification, I then asked the respondents how they defined “race” and “ethnicity.” Some respondents defined the two identically based on differences in skin color, others defined them identically based on ancestral group or national origin, and others either did not have a definition or were unsure about how to define either label. For those individuals who defined race as biologically based on skin color, I asked them why they defined it that way, one respondent, Josh, defined race as follows:

Researcher: So, how do you identify racially?

Josh: I’m Hispanic. I used to identify as Mexican, sometimes as Mexican American but then friends and my girlfriends would refer to me as Hispanic. It doesn’t make a difference to me. If it makes it easier then that’s what I am.

Researcher: Why?

Josh: Well—Because I’m not Black and I’m not White, I’m Mexican or Hispanic or whatever.

Researcher: How do you define race?

Josh: Race—Well, I mean—to me, it’s that there are different colors of skin. We call Black people “Black” because they have black skin. We call White people “White” because they have white skin.

Researcher: So, then how would you define ethnicity?

Josh: It’s the same thing as race to me.

In Josh's definition there is a very evident contradiction--he defines race and ethnicity along Black-White color lines while at the same time he classifies himself as neither Black or White, but "Hispanic." Like Josh several respondents, both Mexican and White, equated race to ethnicity and clarified their belief that Hispanics or Latinos should have their own label.

Others, like Fernando, a twenty-six year old man from South Texas, explain their confusion with racial categories:

Researcher: How would you say you identify yourself racially?

Fernando: I am Mexican first and Hispanic second. I don't understand the racial categorization. I will always be Mexican first. I don't like the words "Hispanic" or "Latino."

Later in the conversation, I asked Fernando how he defined "race" and "ethnicity," to which he replied by saying the following:

Race just confuses me. I don't know what people mean by it. I mean—if I'm supposed to have a race, my choices are Black or White? I mean—all I know is that I'm Mexican. I don't fit into a box. It frustrates me.

Among the non-White respondents there is a common trend of confusion or anger about what race means and the different labels available to them such as Hispanic, Latino, Chicano, or specific ethnic labels like Mexican. Fernando's narrative also describes an emotional response to not having a place or fitting into a box, which is a common feeling among respondents who expressed confusion with the racial classification system. For example, other respondents, especially those born outside of the United States, also expressed their frustrations and emotional reactions to not finding an appropriate category within the racial classification. They also held entirely different views about the racial and ethnic classification system. These views suggest a different cultural

understanding of race relations varying by country of origin in addition to social, political and economic background. Additionally, they also suggest a change in the understanding of race and how the definition of race is transmitted. For example, one respondent, Erica, originally from Mexico, said the following:

I'm Mexican, we don't have different categories in Mexico like they do here. You are either Mexican or you're a foreigner or indigenous. I don't know what is meant by "Hispanic." I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing.

Erica's understanding of how "Hispanic" is used shows that she is superficially familiar with the label but its usage and definition are not clear. In addition, Erica does narrate, further along in the interview, that her partner, John, uses "Hispanic" to identify her but because it comes from someone she cares about, that it must not be a bad label.

Based on these definitions and discussions of race and ethnicity, I asked respondents to self-identify. The responses showed that four ethnic labels emerged: Hispanic, Mexican, Mexican American, and Latino. Table 3 shows the age ranges for each self-identification in addition to achieved levels of education and personal income. This data shows that of the 20 non-White respondents, 12 identified as Hispanic (60%), four identified as Mexican (20%), three identified as Mexican American (15%) and one identified as Latino (5%). Table 3 also reflects that the majority of respondents who self-identified as Hispanic had earned at least a Bachelors degree (40%).

Table 3. Demographic characteristics by racial/ethnic self-identification, Mexican respondents

	Hispanic (%)	Mexican (%)	Mexican American (%)	Latino (%)
Age				
18-29	25	15	5	5
30-39	25	5	5	0
40-49	5	0	0	0
50-64	0	0	5	0
65+	5	0	0	0
Education				
Less than high school	0	5	0	0
High school	20	0	0	0
Some college	0	5	0	0
Bachelors degree	30	10	15	0
Post-graduate degree	10	0	0	5
Personal Income				
\$20,000 or less	5	10	0	0
\$20,001-\$30,000	25	5	0	0
\$30,001-\$40,000	10	5	15	5
\$40,001-\$50,000	5	0	0	0
\$50,001-\$60,000	0	0	0	0
\$60,001-\$70,000	10	0	0	0
\$70,001 and over	0	0	0	0
Unknown	5	0	0	0

When asked about their self-identification I also followed up by asking respondents why they identified with that particular label. Fernando, who identifies as Mexican and does not like the words “Hispanic” and “Latino” said the following about why he identifies as Mexican rather than as Hispanic:

Fernando: I feel it doesn’t apply to me. That’s not who I am. I am MEXICAN... I hate all the race questions on government forms; they piss me off because we aren’t counted. We’re not even considered, not even when using labels like Hispanic or Latino”

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Fernando: I guess—I'm not sure really. I feel like we as Mexican, Hispanic, Latino, whatever you want to label us, don't fit into the little boxes, somehow there are molds set in place and none of them fit us and we haven't been able to create new molds to fit us yet.

Researcher: So, you said you're not Hispanic or Latino, how do you know that you're Mexican?

Fernando: That's what I grew up hearing my entire life from my parents. Where I'm from, I'm *Mexicano* and I'm proud of it.

In Fernando's case, his identity comes from his area of origin, his family and upbringing. For many Mexicans, this identity is rooted not only within family networks, as is Fernando's case, but also within geographical area of origin. Fernando's place of origin, South Texas, is an area with a deeply and historically rooted Mexican identity (Menchaca 2002). Fernando's sentiments also reflect a lack of belonging in the racial stratification of the United States. Similar to Bonilla-Silva's (2002) Latin Americanization theory, Fernando vocalizes that Latinos do not fit into the Black-White binary of racial classification in the United States, but instead, fall into a separate category. However, Fernando believes that Latinos should be placed under their own category, which according to him has not been created yet. However, Bonilla-Silva (2002) and other scholars (Murguía and Saenz 2002) acknowledge the existence of a third category in the racial classification system and that sits between White and Black. For Bonilla-Silva (2002) this third categorization is based on skin tone, where light-skinned Latinos, among other ethnic groups, make up the category of "Honorary Whites." Murguía and Saenz (2002), however, believe that the racial classification has always included a third category, which has shifted throughout time from one that separated White ethnics into their own category to one where those who are considered neither White or Black are situated and which is closely tied to social class standing.

Another respondent, Victoria, a twenty-five year old woman from South Texas, offered a similar narrative about her self-identification:

Researcher: How do you identify yourself racially?

Victoria: I'm Mexican. That's all I've ever known.

Researcher: Why do you identify as Mexican?

Victoria: I grew up in San Antonio and all we ever heard were the stories of the Alamo, Santa Ana, etc. We grew up in a Mexican hood too, so whether or not my parents had been Mexican or not, we would've been Mexican.

For Victoria, her self-identity, like Fernando's, is rooted in her area of origin and upbringing. Victoria attributes her identity as a product of her socialization in South Texas, which is rooted in her family, social networks, neighborhood, and historical context of the specific geographic location.

With these quotes, it is apparent that racial identity for those identifying as "Mexican" is associated with geographic location and the history associated with that particular place. Fernando and Victoria are both originally from historic locations not only to the United States but to Mexico as well. Fernando's hometown lies on the border between Mexico and the U.S. and Victoria's is a nationally recognized historical site significant to the Mexican American War and the incorporation of Texas into the United States.

Erica, on the other hand, identifies as "Mexican" because it is her country of origin and the only identification she has every known based on her socializing experiences in Mexico with family, friends and peers. According to her narrative, race is not something she discussed in Mexico, but rather became something she was made aware of once she was in the United States. Although she still expresses confusion

regarding race and racial identification, she also discusses how for her it seems to be a completely American thing:

I don't know what Hispanic means. It's a totally *gringo* thing. When I came here everyone said to me, "Erica, tu eres Hispana" [Translation: Erica, you are Hispanic]. I would say to them, "No, I'm not. You are. I'm not. I'm MEXICAN."

Irene, another foreign-born respondent, also spoke about her self-identification with reference to how her partner identifies her, reiterating that she is Mexican because of her upbringing in Mexico:

I don't like it when he calls me Hispanic. I'm not Hispanic. I'm Mexican. I grew up in Mexico. I'm not Hispanic.

However, Irene does identify as Mexican American instead of just Mexican. When asked about why she identified that way, she replied by saying that,

Just because I was born in Mexico and grew up there, doesn't mean I don't identify as American. I'm part of this country too and I make sure people know that about me.

Irene's response also shows what other respondents regardless of race have shown, that there is a belief of what it means to be of a certain racial or ethnic group. When I asked her what being Hispanic meant to her, she said:

It means that you were born and raised here. I think of people as being Hispanic when they don't have anything to do with Mexico, like when they don't speak Spanish, when they don't eat Mexican food, when they don't eat spicy food, when they don't celebrate Mexican holidays or when they don't even know about Mexican culture at all. That's Hispanic to me. It means that someone in your family migrated here from somewhere in Latin America but you don't know anything about it so you don't have an affiliation. That's Hispanic... They look the part but they're American.

In Irene's case, she has an idea of what it means to be Mexican or Mexican American and what it means to be Hispanic. Her notions of what it means to be any of those labels are socially constructed from her own experiences, especially from being raised in Mexico. Her conceptions of what it means to be part of any of those categories reflect how foreign-born and native-born people of Latin American descent are racialized and categorized by certain behaviors, in this case, of speaking a certain language, eating certain foods, knowing holidays and cultural events.

Irene was not the only respondent identifying as Mexican American. Vanessa and Carla, both from Southeast Texas and working in the educational system, self-identified as Mexican American. When asked why she identified as Mexican American, Vanessa, a 39 year old woman, linked her identity to her family's national origin and influence:

Researcher: Why do you identify as Mexican American?

Vanessa: Both of my parents came from Mexico. They worked in the fields in California before moving to Texas and having children. I'm Mexican American because I have the best of both worlds. I learned so much from my parents about Mexico and about appreciating all of the freedoms and benefits of being an American. I just can't deny my Mexican ancestry nor could I offend my parents by denying that I'm Mexican.

However, Carla, 58, has different reasons for initially identifying as Mexican American than Vanessa and Irene. Like Irene, Carla not only wants to recognize her cultural group, Mexican, but also that she is American. However, unlike Irene, Carla's identity changed over time as her social settings changed—as a child, she would identify as Mexican in her home and Hispanic at school. Eventually, Carla came to identify as

Mexican American because she was told that it would further her chances of receiving scholarships for college. Her college advisor told her to “play the race card”:

Carla: He told me—that I would only go to college, any college if I told everyone I was Mexican American.

Researcher: Did you identify as Mexican American before talking to your college advisor?

Carla: No, I identified as Mexican and sometimes as Hispanic, depending on where I was. Around my family I was always Mexican. Around school I was usually Hispanic.

Researcher: So, you started identifying as Mexican American because of your advisor, but what kept you identifying like that?

Carla: I don’t know. It just seemed pretty self-explanatory. I’m Mexican but I’m also American. It fit—I didn’t feel insecure saying “Mexican American” as I did with Mexican or Hispanic.

Thus, in Carla’s case, her self-identification changed by physical and social context until she became comfortable with the Mexican American identity. Initially, the Mexican American identity was also imposed on her by someone outside of her family and social group because of the belief that claiming a particular minority status aids certain minorities in receiving scholarships or other benefits. Imposed identity as it relates to the respondents in this study will be covered in the next section.

Of the 20 Mexican respondents, Jaime, a 28 year old man from the southern part of Texas, is the only respondent to identify as “Latino.” Jaime emphasizes that he attributes his identity to his parents’ political involvement in the Chicano movement of the 1960s. For him, the influence of his parents’ ideology and activism encouraged and instilled a sense of national pride:

Jaime: My parents went to rallies and meetings. I remember seeing all the pictures of them when they were young. My dad would sit me in his lap and tell me about people he met all over the country, like César Chávez and Dolores Huerta. I always wanted to fight like my parents had fought, be active in the community, and organize other Latinos....

Researcher: So, why do you identify as Latino?

Jaime: I wasn't part of the Chicano movement, I can't identify with something I wasn't part of. I feel disrespectful if I claim that I am Chicano, but Latino fits... "Latino" unites people, brings them together under one term— one label. Kind of like "Chicano" or "Chicana" was for my parents...

In addition, Jaime expresses not feeling comfortable appropriating a label representative of a historically significant movement of which he is not directly a part of but by which he is highly influenced. However, he does take on the identification of "Latino," because as Jaime explains, it is a uniting term, it evokes a similar feeling or identity as "Chicano" did for his parents but without adopting an identity that he feels is not his to adopt.

The different ways in which Mexican respondents self-identify show how identity varies across the different experiences of these respondents. Also, these responses reflect the influence of experiences and relationships in shaping and transforming identities. Omi and Winant (1994) and Cornell and Hartmann (1997) have argued that racial and ethnic identities are fluid and contingent upon situations and moments. Based on the responses obtained from the Mexican respondents, we can see that the identities among the Mexican respondents are indeed fluid, changing, and flexible.

In addition to the aforementioned self-identifications, a large portion of respondents identified as "Hispanic," which I found to be reflexive of a different understanding of the Mexican experience in the United States. In these interviews, the Mexican respondents narrated experiences in which their White partners imposed identities on them. The following section explores how the interviews reflect not just

how the identities of Mexican respondents are influenced by their White partners, but how the White respondents perceive their partners.

Imposed Hispanicity

One of the themes that became obvious as I was coding data was how individuals in relationships perceived the racial and/or ethnic identities of their partners and how those perceptions sometimes led to impositions. Several respondents talked about how their partners, in particular the White partners, had preexisting notions of what it meant to be Mexican or Hispanic. Several White partners said their partners were or were not Mexican based on their preconceived notions. For example, Sean, a 41-year-old White male said the following about his wife, Sofia:

She's pretty much White... She has no cultural ties to Mexico... I'm an honorary Mexican and I feel like I'm more Mexican than her sometimes. She's pretty White, really... She doesn't speak Spanish, she eats White people food. She's White.

Narratives like Sean's not only reveal his preconception of what it means to be Mexican (in this case of having ties with a cultural community) but what it means to be White. Sean does not vocalize what it means to be White but assumes that his wife does not fit into his Mexican category but into what he preconceives to be White. These preconceptions not only reflect how his perceptions of his partner affect her identity, but also how her identity is racialized as "White" and not as Hispanic, Latino or Mexican.

Other respondents, like Cristobal, also indicate that their partners had preconceived notions of what it meant to be Hispanic. One of his first interactions with Lorrie reflects just that:

I met Lorrie at a party... she danced with all of my friends, but I never got a chance... she kept saying she was a White girl and didn't know how to dance... I was confused... she thought I would be a good dancer because I was Hispanic.

Lorrie perceived Cristobal to be a good dancer because of his race or ethnicity and in turn also imposed that identity not only onto him but also onto her own Whiteness. By saying that she was a White girl and implying she would not be as good of a dancer as Cristobal because of her racial group, she not only attributed good dancing to Cristobal because of his ethnic group, but also made a distinction in the racial or ethnic characteristics that exist between them.

Like the previous section on self-identity showed, several of the White respondents defaulted to identifying their partners as Hispanic because they thought it was the more acceptable and encompassing label for them. Some of the Mexican respondents who accepted the term "Hispanic" as their self-identity also mentioned their own confusion with the terminology and how that led to their identification as "Hispanic." For example, Mateo identifies the following as his rationale behind identifying as Hispanic:

I grew up in Miami, everybody assumed I was Cuban... I'm not, but I know a lot about Cuba and Cubans... I also know a lot of Brazilians in Miami and here in Texas... I've talked with all of them about how they identify... sometimes I feel like I'm having an identity crisis... When I came to College Station I heard "Hispanic" a lot... *a lot*. Erin was using it, I had no idea what the #!@ it meant, I probably don't use it correctly... I don't care... I get less questions when I tell people I'm Hispanic instead of "Hi, I'm Mateo, I'm Mexican and I'm from Miami"... people question if there really are Mexicans in Miami. Less questions, except when people actually ask me what "Hispanic" means and then I look like an idiot.

Mateo's experience with how others perceived him, especially when introduced to a new term, like Hispanic by his partner, was a catalyst for him to identify as what he perceives

to be the least difficult explanation of his identity. Through this process, his identification as Hispanic does not necessarily reflect how he actually feels about his identity but rather what is the most convenient and least troublesome explanation for who he is. As the interview continued, I asked Mateo if he still identified as Mexican and in what contexts that was the case. He responded by saying the following:

Mateo: I guess sometimes it depends on who's around... if I meet other Hispanics, they want to know more... they'll usually start speaking Spanish... I think they do it so they can see where you're from. I am Mexican whenever I meet other Hispanics.

Researcher: What about when you're around Whites? Other racial groups?

Mateo: I guess I'm Hispanic around everybody else.

Table 4 shows how individuals self-identify and how their partners also identify them. Although the table shows how respondents were racially identified by their partners, narratives like Mateo's reflect an experiential component that influences identification. Experiences, such as Mateo's change of geographic location and new partner add new layers that impact how he chooses to self identify by the situation he is placed in. This further supports constructionist views about race and demonstrates the fluidity of race and ethnicity in time and space.

Within the context of space an important element that came up when I interviewed foreign-born Mexican respondents about how their partners perceived their racial identity was that it was an "American" thing. For example, Erica, a thirty-five year old woman from Zacatecas, Mexico said the following about how her partner, John, identifies her:

Erica: I'm Mexican, we don't have different categories in Mexico like they do here. You are either Mexican or you're a foreigner or indigenous. I don't know

what is meant by “Hispanic”. I don’t know if it’s a good thing or if it’s a bad thing... John calls me Hispanic so I don’t think it’s bad. There are too many categories here.

Researcher: Why do you think John calls you Hispanic? Does it make you think differently about who you are?

Erica: I don’t know why he calls me Hispanic... that’s what he’s comfortable with. It makes me feel weird when he calls me that, because I don’t know what it really means... maybe he’s just calling me that to be mean, I don’t know. Maybe he just wants to put me into that category because that’s what is appropriate here in the United States.

This adds another layer of complexity, in particular for Mexicans born in Mexico. For people like Erica, it is not just necessary to understand an entirely new racial and ethnic system, but to comprehend the different labels and what they mean. To someone like Erica who does not use the label Hispanic in her culture of origin, these racial and ethnic labels are imposed, as we can see from her narrative.

Similarly to Suzanne Oboler’s (1995) study about the meanings of the word “Hispanic” among Spanish-speaking respondents, Erica’s response reflects an aversion towards the use of the word “Hispanic.” Oboler’s (1995) respondents found the word “Hispanic” negative because it assumes that everyone categorized under it has the same experience because of a shared language. Erica’s narrative does not reflect dissatisfaction because of those assumptions but rather because of the ambiguity of the term, which is a recurring theme throughout the interviews conducted for this study.

Table 4. Self-identification and perceived identification by couple

Names	Self-identification	How they are identified by their partner
Jennifer	White	White
Fernando	Mexican	Mexican
Judith	Hispanic	Hispanic
Mark	White	White
Lorrie	White	White
Cristobal	Hispanic	Hispanic
Megan	White	White
Jaime	Latino	Latino
Stefanie	Mexican	Mexican
James	White	White
Victoria	Mexican	Hispanic
Arthur	White	White
Brenda	White	White
Josh	Hispanic	Hispanic
Daniela	Hispanic	Hispanic
Jason	White	White
Deborah	White	White
Gerardo	Hispanic	Hispanic
Erica	Mexican	Hispanic
John	White	White
Ann	White	White
Jorge	Hispanic	Hispanic
Carla	Mexican American	Mexican American
Gary	White	White
Elizabeth	Hispanic	Hispanic
Kevin	White	White
Erin	White	White
Mateo	Hispanic	Hispanic
Irene	Mexican American	Hispanic
William	White	White
Margarita	Hispanic	Hispanic
Matthew	White	White
Mariana	Hispanic	Hispanic
Zach	European /Anglo	White
Sofia	Hispanic	White
Sean	White	White
Vanessa	Mexican American	Hispanic
Chris	White	White
Veronica	Hispanic	Hispanic
Jacob	White	White

Another foreign-born respondent, Irene, spoke of her experience being identified differently by her partner:

Irene: I don't like it when he calls me Hispanic. I'm not Hispanic. I'm Mexican. I grew up in Mexico. I'm not Hispanic.

Researcher: What does being Hispanic mean to you?

Irene: It means that you were born and raised here. I think of people as being Hispanic when they don't have anything to do with Mexico, like when they don't speak Spanish, when they don't eat Mexican food, when they don't eat spicy food, when they don't celebrate Mexican holidays or when they don't even know about Mexican culture at all. That's Hispanic to me. It means that someone in your family migrated here from somewhere in Latin America but you don't know anything about it so you don't have an affiliation. That's Hispanic... They look the part but they're American.

Irene's response also shows what other respondents, regardless of race, have shown--that there is a belief of what it means to be of a certain racial or ethnic group. In Irene's case, she has an idea of what it means to be Mexican or Mexican American and what it means to be Hispanic. Her notions of what it means to be any of those labels are socially constructed from her own experiences, especially being raised in Mexico. Her conceptions of what it means to be part of any of those categories reflect how foreign-born and native-born people of Latin American descent are racialized and categorized by certain behaviors.

Fernando, who stated that he felt like Latinos were not included into the racial and ethnic strata in the U.S. also felt that his partner had preconceived notions of his culture and background. To him, discussing his identity, explaining it to his partner, allowing her to see his hometown and introducing him to his family and friends did not change his identity from one to another, but rather solidified the identity he had already chosen:

I'm not sure. I hadn't really thought about it. I mean—I think the people in your life influence your life, I really do, but I'm not entirely sure if this is the case. I've discussed it with her, of course, but if anything, discussing it with her has only solidified my feelings about my identity. I know talking about it and her coming to the Valley has changed a lot of how she sees me and how she sees my family, in a good way.

His interaction also took his relationship outside of the context of their geographic location of residence to his place of birth where his family still resides. According to Fernando, visiting his place of origin had an impact on Jennifer's perception of him and the understanding of his identity and his family.

Other respondents, however, expressed changing their self-identification throughout their lives. Some respondents, like Elizabeth, a seventy-three year old, married woman, narrates a different experience about her changes in her self-identification due to changes in her direct environment:

Researcher: How do you identify racially?

Elizabeth: As Hispanic, I guess. I don't see race, I don't judge people by the color of their skin. I base my opinions on what the person is like.

Researcher: Why do you identify as Hispanic?

Elizabeth: I used to identify as Mexican when we lived in the *barrio*⁴ and went to a Mexican school, but when we integrated with the *bolillos*⁵ I loved it, I loved knowing new people and just started identifying as Hispanic. I was always taught to get to know people and to not judge them. It's not my job to judge, that's up to God.

Similar to Harris and Sim's (2002) study where the identities of multiracial individuals vary due to socialization with distinct racial groups, Elizabeth's narrative articulates that over time and as she was socialized into varying racial groups, her racial self-identification changed from Mexican to Hispanic. Throughout the interview, Elizabeth

⁴ *Barrio* refers to the neighborhood, generally an all-Hispanic neighborhood.

⁵ *Bolillo* is a reference to typical, white, French-style bread made in Mexico, which in the context of racial categorization is used to refer to White people in the United States.

also emphasizes her color-blindness, which Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues is a racial ideology, phrases and stories that help Whites justify White supremacy. Bonilla-Silva (2010) also explains that these are collective representations communicated throughout society. Although Elizabeth identifies as Hispanic, her color-blindness also shows the influence of the White, dominant culture on how she should perceive the current state of race relations. The adoption of a color-blind ideology also shows how Mexicans to a certain extent incorporate a White storyline of color-blindness into their own lives. Elizabeth not only adopted the White, color-blind ideology but also the label of “Hispanic” as her self-identification. Additionally, she also acknowledges the direct influence of Whites on her life to the extent of changing her self-identification from Mexican to Hispanic.

As we discussed Elizabeth’s racial identity further, and especially in relation to her marriage to Kevin, she articulated a reinforcement of Hispanicity with how he labeled her:

Kevin didn’t know what to call me. My family identified as *Mexicanos* and I really liked the word Hispanic, so he was confused for a long time. I felt bad for him, but I didn’t know how to explain to him that I was allowed to change what label I wanted to use. He finally settled on calling me Hispanic and I told him that he needed to call me whatever I told him he should call me... it was none of his business to call me something else. He obeyed [laughs] and we haven’t discussed it ever since.

Examples of narratives like Elizabeth’s reiterate how dynamic and fluid racial and ethnic identification. Additionally, Elizabeth’s narrative presents a conflict with identification—Elizabeth displays enthusiasm when retelling her stories of integration from the *barrio* and her new found identity as “Hispanic”; her excitement, however,

dwindles immediately when that belief is challenged by her partner who challenges the use of “Hispanic.”

The examples of Victoria’s, Fernando’s, and especially Elizabeth’s narratives indicate that interactions with others cannot only alter how people identify, but can also solidify and strengthen their self-identifications. Several respondents, like Elizabeth, also mentioned changes in their self-identification during different periods in their lives. Some, like Jorge, a forty-four year old man from East Central Texas, expressed feeling differently about his racial identification at different times in his life:

I don’t know. I feel like I’ve identified differently at different stages of my life. When I was a kid, I visited my grandma a lot and she’d say to me, “*Mijo, tu eres Mexicano pero tambien eres Americano. Acuerdate de eso siempre*” [Translation: “Son, you are Mexican but you are also American. Always remember that]... For some reason that just stayed with me... I used to say, “Soy bien Mexicano” [“I’m really, really Mexican”] but the more I talked to friends and co-workers the more I’d feel confused. I heard so many words used to describe me, some were okay, I guess, like, “Hispanic”, “Latino”, “Mexican”, “Mexican American”, and others were hurtful, like, “spic”, “beaner” and “wetback”... When Ann and I started dating she would refer to me as Hispanic, I think she just thought it was the most appropriate and inoffensive name. So, I let her keep calling me that and now I identify that way. I guess it’s the least confusing for people. I don’t know.

In this quote, Jorge reveals feeling confused about the terminology that best fit him, eventually leading him to identify with the panethnic label of “Hispanic.” Like Elizabeth, the contexts throughout his life altered his self-identification, from a strong sense of being “Mexican” from childhood, to a confusion about terminology from adulthood, and, finally, to a settlement on “Hispanic” as a result of prolonged identification by his partner. Several of the other respondents identifying as Hispanic narrated similar stories about their self-identification, most of which stated that their

identification was Hispanic because it was the simplest and most unquestioned label to use. Another respondent, Josh, says the following about his self-identification:

I used to identify as Mexican, sometimes as Mexican American but then friends and my girlfriends would refer to me as Hispanic. It doesn't make a difference to me. If it makes it easier then that's what I am.

In Jorge's case, Ann's perception of his racial identity as Hispanic influenced his decision to adopt the same label as his identity. Both Josh's and Jorge's experiences reflect a larger structural problem—their Mexican identities are being perceived by Whites and others as Hispanic, which then translates into the individuals using those same labels because it facilitates interaction and discussion with other people, primarily Whites.

The data in this section suggests that racial identification rests on multiple factors, including self-definition. In the United States, the tendency is to categorize racial "others" in relation to whiteness and thus further sustaining the ideology that "White" is the norm. The category of "Hispanic" then easily fades into the middle rungs of the racial hierarchy and non-whiteness, omitting the multiple differences in U.S. society while simultaneously burying the differences within "Hispanic." "Hispanic" is a relatively new, vague and contested label and one that has been the center of much discussion. Among these discussions is the belief that it is imposed by the hostile dominant culture. In this case, this imposition is rooted from the history of colonialism, beginning with the Spanish conquest, and including the forcibly included Black and Native people (Kaminsky 1994).

In contrast, in the following section I will explore how White identity itself is not changed by the interaction with Mexican partners, but rather, how these interactions affect behaviors and reactions associated with whiteness. The data collected about White respondents shows two recurring themes, an increased racial awareness and an understanding of their surrounding social systems. The following section will explore these findings in further detail.

White Identity

For many participants, and especially among White respondents, pinpointing changes to their identity in terms of race and ethnicity was difficult, especially given the complexity of their identities. Of the ten White respondents, nine identified as White and one identified as European American/Anglo. For White respondents, their identities were not changed, but their behaviors about whiteness and other races changed. While changes in White identity are attributed to these changes in attitudes and beliefs about whiteness and non-Whites, research has shown that these changes are not salient to racial identity (Gallagher 1994; Mahoney 1997; McIntosh 1997). Instead, the White identity remains unchanged and usually unquestioned. Other patterns of whiteness also suggest that Whites become aware of their whiteness and the privilege associated with it. However, awareness of privilege is not a change in identity. Whites remain as Whites and retain the privilege associated with their racial group. Furthermore, because changes in racial identity do not occur among Whites, this section focuses on the behavioral and attitudinal changes discussed by respondents, including an increased awareness of whiteness and an increased understanding of the inequalities experienced by non-Whites.

For White participants in this study, their sense of self, especially in relation to race and/or ethnicity was not something many of them had actively thought about in the past. Given their White dominant status, issues of race and ethnicity in terms of understanding oneself or one's position in the racial structure, may not have been as salient. For many, their interracial relationship or marriage provided an opportunity to think about their whiteness and meanings associated with being White, the dominant racial group in our society, for the first time. For Whites, their new understandings came from thinking about race and/or ethnicity. Because the relationship did not affect their personal identification as anything other than White but caused changes in their way of thinking about race and/or ethnicity, there is not much to be discussed about White self-identity, perceived identity or imposed identity, in contrast to the non-White respondents. Instead, changes in their understandings about the racial hierarchy and structure will be discussed.

Although my questionnaire did not directly address the changes in racial awareness among respondents, it emerged as a recurring theme throughout the interview process. Following is a discussion of the findings on racial awareness obtained from the interviews.

As noted earlier, scholars have suggested that in studies of whiteness, results have shown two trends: racial awareness and White supremacy. Foeman and Nance (1999) concluded from their study of Black and White interracial couples, that each partner in the interracial relationship gained new insights about oneself, especially in relation to one's race and ethnicity. Similarly, results from this study indicate that

interracial relationships influenced the racial and/or ethnic identities of both Mexican and White respondents.

The following section provides more information about racial awareness among Whites in interracial relationships. I examine below the emerging racial awareness of Whites and how it affects their perceptions and identifications of their partners. This section includes discussions on White privilege, White awareness and sympathy to other minority groups, and Whites becoming White allies fighting against discrimination.

Among the discussions of White identity an important point of discussion is the extent to which Whites really understand their privilege and structural racial inequalities. According to Peggy McIntosh (1997), Whites are neither racially aware nor conscious about their own placement in the racial hierarchies. Respondents from this study, such as Jacob, a 34-year old White man from Southeast Texas, acknowledge an increased awareness of the hardships endured by non-Whites:

I remember when we first came to College Station, people would stare at us... I never knew why really... Veronica told me it was because she was brown. I told her it wasn't true... but the more it happened, the more I saw it, I couldn't believe it! It caused some problems in our relationship... I would make comments to people looking at us. I don't have to go to school here so I don't have anything to lose. I didn't know if they were looking at us because we were together... because she was with me or because I was with her. She had to explain it to me, that people always look at her when she's walking with Whites or Blacks or whoever.

Another respondent, Zach, has also relayed a similar story:

We are looked at differently when we are out in public. It happened to us in California too, but not like this. I get really mad. It's none of their business who is with who. Sometimes I get madder at things like this than Mariana does. She seems to brush it off or ignore it more.... Maybe because she's dealt with it much more throughout her life, people looking at her differently... she's told me about awkward and uncomfortable moments before. The more it happens the more

aware I become of it and the more it annoys me. I know that there really isn't anything that I can do, Mariana had to explain that to me...

When I asked both Jacob and Zach whether or not this changed how they looked at their partner or how they sympathized with their hardships, Jacob replied by saying:

I understand more, at least I think I do. I almost look for it now whenever we are walking together or whenever we are among people who don't know us. I'm more alert, I think. It also makes me much more protective, especially now that we have a daughter. I worry about how people will treat Michelle whenever they see her parents.

Reflections such as Jacob's show the differences between his and his partner's journey related to racial identity. While Veronica's experience with how she is perceived is not new to her, for Jacob, his journey has just begun. What Veronica has experienced, is an internalization of her racial experience throughout the course of her life which has allowed her to better understand her own place in a racialized society. On the other hand, White respondents focus on the racial and/or ethnic aspects of themselves and their understandings of their whiteness can be seen by Megan's narrative about her own identity and her partner's:

I'm White, that's what I will always be and that will never change. But, I think this marriage has changed me for the good. Talking to Jaime puts everything in perspective... I have privilege whether I want to or not I have it... I just have to try to use it for good instead of just taking it for granted or ignoring that I have it.

Overall, Whites experienced more change and self-reflection in how they viewed and experienced others in the context of the interracial relationship than their Mexican counterparts. First, Whites experienced a greater exposure to new racial and ethnic groups. Unlike the Mexican respondents who for the most part grew up engaging with

the White majority, often having White friends and partners in the past, a majority of Whites did not have that exposure to other racial groups. Many of the White participants spoke of gaining new sets of friends or being part of a new community outside their own racial group as a result of dating their partners, which changed how they thought, interacted, and behaved toward members of their racial/ethnic groups. In this way, Whites were co-constructing and developing their racial and/or ethnic identities in relation to other and changing their behaviors according to the social and cultural demands of their environment. For example, Kevin, a 73-year old man from Iowa, offers his experience in courting and marrying Elizabeth:

Researcher: How do you identify ethnically?

Kevin: I've been adopted into Elizabeth's family so I think I'm Hispanic. They tell me I'm an honorary Hispanic because her family treats me like one of their own. Her dad and I had a very close relationship. I hardly talk to my own family in Iowa... we had a falling out, over something petty... but, it worked out for the best. I'm happy where I'm at and with the family that I've been adopted into.

Researcher: Are there any other reasons why you identify ethnically as Hispanic?

Kevin: Well, I learned Spanish and all the customs from all the events we have gone to. Her dad didn't speak much English, but we were really good friends, so I understand a lot of Spanish because of the long conversations he and I had. Her family has a lot of parties and they are all Hispanic people who attend them for the most part. I know the traditions... I feel like I've been immersed in the lifestyle since Elizabeth and I first began dating, which was over fifty years ago.

Although Kevin believes that his ethnic identity has changed or been influenced by his estrangement from his own family and acceptance into his wife's Hispanic family, his White racial identity is still the same. As part of his White privilege, he has the luxury of saying that he considers himself Hispanic even though he may not be. Therefore, Kevin's identification as ethnically Hispanic does not only indicate an internal two-way process of identity development, but rather supports a social constructionist theory of

identity development, where identities are seen as dynamic and interpersonal processes created across multiple contexts (Ashmore & Jussim 1997).

Second, unlike Mexican respondents who may not have experienced as much resistance from their family when it came to dating outside their own racial and/or ethnic group, many Whites were surprised by the disapproval from their parents. Some White respondents discovered that their partners held prejudiced views, something they had not recognized in the past. This often led to added feelings of anger and an increased awareness of racism and prejudice, especially among their own social and relational groups. For example, Deborah narrates her parents' reaction to her relationship with Gerardo:

They were terrible people to him when they first found out I was dating a Hispanic man. Whenever I would write to them or talk to them on the phone they would always say nasty things about him, and they didn't even know him yet.... They tried to make it seem like they didn't like him because we met while working together... they kept asking why I would want to be with a Hispanic man who was probably involved in drugs and kidnapping like they had seen on the news. I couldn't believe they would say that! I mean... it was really hurtful and not just to me as their daughter, but to a man they didn't even know... it made me so angry. I still am in shock... I couldn't believe how racist they were, how judgmental, racist and hurtful they could be to people they didn't know... I swore from that moment to never to talk about anyone the way they talked about Gerardo or to treat anyone poorly without knowing them based on the color of their skin or their background.

For Deborah, her parents' reaction to her partner permitted her to recognize how racist her family was. As a result, her awareness of racism increased and she chose to reject those practices.

Responses from this study also show that Whites reported an increased awareness of their Mexican partner's race and ethnicity. Even most Mexican partners

believed they had a greater impact on their partner's understandings of themselves than their White partner had on their understanding of themselves. In many ways, increased awareness of their Mexican partner's race and/or ethnicity reported by many Whites is expected given the general lack of awareness at the beginning of the relationship. For many Whites, lack of exploration of one's own White racial identity and the privileges associated with that identity, is the starting point in developing a White racial identity (Rowe et al. 1994). In relation to the theme of Whiteness and/or White privilege, Mark spoke about his new awareness and his interpretation about the meaning of being White. He also spoke about his interpretation of what it means to be Hispanic or Mexican in the United States and how that was reflected in his whiteness:

It's very different dating someone who is not White, they think differently than you do. I never thought about how truly privileged I was until I started dating Judith. Especially as a White man. I mean, I knew from reading and from classes that there were disparities, but reading is different from being involved in an experience that changes your outlook completely. Before being with Judith I was detached to my privilege and to my Whiteness. Now, I see it, I mean, I truly see it. I now think in terms of my Whiteness... I know my role in society and I know how I contribute to it... My choices are always easier because of that privilege, I'm part of the dominant culture. I don't have to worry about being pulled over randomly and searched by the police or other similar situations. Judith just got pulled over by a cop for absolutely no reason. I could and couldn't believe it.

Mark talks about the privilege not only associated with being White, but also being a White male. His narrative relates his White male status to systemic racism and the ease of the choices associated with being part of the majority group.

Some respondents, like James, have even expressed having an added privilege associated with Whiteness—choosing not to think or feel prejudice or discrimination:

Although I think I might be more aware of discrimination and prejudice, I also have a choice in it. It's not that personal for me... I can turn it on and off...

sometimes I react, sometimes I don't. It doesn't personally affect *me* like it does Stephanie or her parents or my friends. I can walk into a situation and if I see or feel like someone is being prejudiced or discriminating against someone I can choose... mostly by mood... if I want to react or not. It's not an immediate reaction, necessarily. I know there are people out there who think that because they are White they are better than everybody else... I generally ignore those people, depending on what they say and who it's directed to. But, since I've been with Stephanie I've become more sensitive to discrimination against Hispanics and that really gets me going regardless of the situation.

James does not directly link his whiteness to his added privilege, but alludes to it throughout this part of the interview. He does, however, express an increased awareness and defensiveness towards prejudice directed at Hispanics. Several other respondents also had similar reactions to James', including some who spoke about actively doing something about their new knowledge regarding Whiteness and racism. For several White respondents, especially women, this new racial awareness led them to become White allies. As White allies many expressed acting in support of less privileged groups and educating others about racism and White privilege. Many of these White allies used their power and privilege to empower or support minority groups. Megan, a 28-year old woman from Missouri, indicates how she has become involved in the community:

When I first met Jaime he changed how I viewed my Whiteness, it was a revelation for me... I was just this Midwestern girl, majoring in Leisure Studies who had grown up around Whites, I didn't know anything about anything. He shared so much with me... I just knew I had to help fight against racism. Now, I work at a non-profit organization and I teach about racism and diversity but most importantly about social justice. Without hearing about Jaime's experiences or his parents who were part of the Chicano movement back in the '60s, I would've never known otherwise. My bubble would've never burst. I think that other Whites respond well when I talk to them about it, they don't feel like it's "the angry minority" talking to them and yelling at them for being White. They can relate, they associate with what I tell them. It works, it really does.

Megan's experience dating Jaime was a major turning point not only in her personal life and awareness of self and others, but also stimulated a change in direction within her career from working as an administrative assistant at a university to pursuing community organizing and advocacy for women and minorities.

For White respondents, their Mexican partners challenged and questioned previously held views and introduced them to new perspectives and ways of seeing the world. For the majority of White respondents who also grew up in predominantly White environments, they did not have many opportunities to think about their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Many of their own views about the world were views already existing in the larger society and had never been challenged by others around them. Unlike Mexican respondents who felt different and out of place within their White environment, White respondents grew up with others who looked like them and often thought like them. Given this background, the interracial relationship created an opportunity to rethink and reexamine previously held views. For many, it was the first time they were confronted with their whiteness.

FINAL REMARKS

In this chapter, I have shown that the identity formation for Mexican partners in relationships with Whites is a fluid and dynamic process with multiple layers and dimensions and influenced by varying contexts and interactions. Specifically, I have observed how individuals in Mexican-White relationships navigate through the different ways of identifying racially and ethnically. First, I provided a general overview of the couples and their characteristics. Subsequently, I examined the self-identification of the

Mexican respondents and how they were influenced. Next, I analyzed how the “Hispanic” identity is imposed on Mexicans by Whites. Lastly, I discussed how White identity is static and how being in a relationship with a Mexican individual helped change behaviors, attitudes and beliefs in their White counterparts, but did not alter their racial identity. In the next chapter I will provide an overview of the results. This concluding chapter will also answer the research question driving this research: How are racial and ethnic identities affected, if at all, among interracial couples living in a mostly White space?

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study examined the racial and ethnic identities of individuals in interracial relationships, in particular of Mexicans and Whites in Brazos County, Texas. Although numerous studies have examined the identities and identity formation of racial/ethnic minorities and Whites, only a limited number have focused on identity formation among individuals in interracial relationships. Even less attention has focused on the identity formation of Mexicans and Whites in the context of interracial relationships. Because Mexicans, among other Latino groups are a fast growing population in the United States, they represent an ideal population to examine racial formation in a relational context. Furthermore, the analysis of racial identity among Mexicans allows us to examine how Mexicans perceive their own racial and ethnic identities in addition to how and why Whites impose identities on them. Data collected through semi-structured interviews in Brazos County were utilized to conduct this study.

In examining the characteristics of Mexicans and Whites in interracial relationships, the findings reported in the previous chapter showed that: 1) there is variation in self-identification among Mexicans resulting from socialization and historical contexts, 2) Whites impose the Hispanic label as an identification because of its construction as non-threatening, and 3) the identity of Whites is static and retains White privilege. First, racial and ethnic self-identification among Mexican respondents presented a variety of terms created and used to identify themselves. Results from this

study show that Mexican respondents identify as Mexican, Mexican American, Hispanic and Latino, and thus, we can conclude, like Portes and MacLeod (1996), that populations of Latin American descent are too varied to create a coherent whole under one identifying label. Additionally, contrary to Oboler's (1995) findings regarding the rejection of the label "Hispanic," this study shows an acceptance and adoption of "Hispanic" as an identity consistent across socioeconomic status, age, and gender.

Furthermore, unlike the results found from Golash-Boza and Darity's (2008) research on skin gradation and self-identity, results from this study revealed that none of the Mexican respondents, regardless of personal and household income, identified as White. Thus, I reject their hypothesis that Latinos with higher class status are more likely to identify as White. Results from this study show that none of the Mexican respondents identified as White. However, twelve of the twenty Mexican respondents from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, identified as Hispanic.

To examine identities more fully, this study also focused on how interacting with romantic partners of different racial and ethnic identities affected the identities of individuals. The data shows that for some of the Mexican respondents, the relationship with their White partner solidified and strengthened their existing identity. For others, adopting a Hispanic identity was more accommodating for their White partners and around other Whites. Several Mexican respondents also expressed confusion about racial categories in the United States. This was a common feeling in both native-born and foreign-born Mexican respondents. These expressions of self-identification, whether reinforced or influenced, demonstrate how fluid and dynamic racial and ethnic

identity is among Mexicans. In addition, that fluidity and dynamism is affected by context. Some Mexican respondents expressed identifying differently depending on what racial and ethnic groups they were interacting with. Outside of in-group interactions among other Mexicans, some respondents said they were more likely to identify as Hispanic. Also, identification changed depending on actual physical location. Among foreign-born respondents the general consensus was that in Mexico their identification is of Mexican, but in the U.S. they are either unsure of the appropriate label to use or they adopt the “Hispanic” label.

Second, according to Ashmore and Jussim (1997) and Suyemoto (2002), racial and ethnic identity formation is a dynamic process varying across contexts, as well as a process of construction and reconstruction through experience. As such, the results obtained from the Mexican population of this study support Omi and Winant (1994) and Ashmore and Jussim’s (1997) arguments about the creation of racial and ethnic identities through relationships and relational contexts. Data from this study shows that White partners were more likely to refer to their partners as “Hispanic” versus any other racial/ethnic label, even when that partner did not initially self-identify as such. Research by Hayes-Bautista and Chapa (1987) found that “Hispanic” is a racial label imposed on people of national origin groups and certain geographical regions. Additionally, Nelson and Tienda (1997) also indicate that “Hispanic” manages to combine colonized populations with their colonizers under one label. The results from this study show that Whites felt that “Hispanic” was the least offensive and complicated identity to use when describing their partners. Adopting a label because of it is non-

threatening and ambiguous definition also supports studies focusing on the “off-white” or “Honorary White” position of Latinos in the racial hierarchy. By classifying Latinos as “off-white” or even as “Hispanic,” Whites retain their privilege and power while simultaneously elevating or lowering the status of “Hispanics,” thus, portraying them as non-threatening.

Third, the analysis shows that while racial and ethnic identity among Mexican respondents supports the argument that identity is fluid, dynamic and likely to change, White identity showed the opposite. Although Helms (1990) developed several ways of measuring White racial identity, including developing a theory with stages of White identity development, her research reflects, as Rowe et al. (1994) have noted, a behavioral and attitudinal change towards whiteness and otherness rather than a shift in White identity. Similarly, the results from this study reflect the development of new sensitivities among White respondents, but White identity itself remains static and unchanged. The lack of dynamism in White identity among respondents in this study can be attributed to the position of Whites as the dominant, and therefore privileged, racial group and their lack of awareness of their own racial or ethnic identity (Mahoney 1997; McIntosh 1997). In addition, Whites in this study expressed a newfound racial awareness which was reflexive of how their Mexican partners are treated and perceived rather than about their racial privileges. Therefore, this study supports the findings of Hartman, Gerteis and Croll (2009), where Whites are less aware of their own white privilege than individuals from racial minorities.

In summary, major findings from this study emphasize the fluidity, dynamism and variety by context of Mexican identity. Additionally, Mexicans self-identify under a variety of labels and definitions which are affected not only by context, but socialization, areas of origin, and current geographic location. Furthermore, this fluidity and variety of labels speaks to Latin Americanization theory (Bonilla-Silva 2002) where light-skinned Latinos are placed in the middle, buffer category “Honorary White” and dark-skinned Latinos fall in the “collective Black” category. However, Murguía and Saenz (2002) argue that tri-racial stratification has always existed in the U.S., where Whites of all ethnic backgrounds are placed at the top, middle-class Asians and Latinos in the middle, and lastly, working- and lower-class people of color at the bottom. Taking into consideration these two views about the tri-racial hierarchy in the United States, the fluidity of identity among Mexicans becomes an important component of understanding and navigating that hierarchy. As such, the results indicate that a fluid, dynamic and contextual identity can help analyze and even change the racial projects discussed by Omi and Winant (1994) in previous chapters.

Secondly, results from this study discuss the role of White partners in imposing “Hispanic” as an identity on their significant others. These results contribute to a variety of frameworks, including racialization, and more specifically the racialization of Mexicans. Results show that the label “Hispanic” is viewed as non-threatening and appropriate for not causing confusion and misidentification. We can then say that Whites view Mexicans or “Hispanics” as non-threatening and in a category of their own that does not disturb the status quo of racial and ethnic relations in the United States.

Additionally, the results contribute to the literature on racial and ethnic identity formation and reinforce the argument that identities are fluid and dynamic, but only with regards to Mexican identity.

Lastly, data collected on Whites supports previous studies emphasizing how behavioral and attitudinal changes occur within individuals. Furthermore, this study also supports the argument that White identity does not change, but rather is static and unchanging. Thus, Whites remain invisible and retain the status quo of White privilege. Therefore, this analysis helps to increase our knowledge about how White identity translates into the retention of power and position in the racial hierarchy.

SHORTCOMINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the importance of these findings, this analysis has some shortcomings that I will identify and discuss. First, initially this project aimed to focus on the intersectionality of race, class and gender as they relate to dating between the Mexican and White populations in a selected county. As data collection continued, it became apparent that although collecting data in Brazos County was the most convenient for the researcher, it did not aid in producing work on intersectionality. I acknowledge that there are other locations that would have produced more variation in responses and demographic information about respondents. Future studies should examine communities with greater racial diversity and compare these results with the ones found in this thesis.

Second, the snowball sampling approach employed in this study prevented me from finding respondents of all different socioeconomic statuses. Thus I had to adjust

my study to work within a middle-class, White space. Snowball sampling and the location of research also prevented me from generalizing my results to other communities and to Mexican-White couples living in other parts of the United States. Snowball sampling also presented limitations in my study such as difficulty finding respondents through the specific criteria originally outlined in this project. Specifically, this project initially aimed to discuss identity formation within the context of solely married couples. However, finding such specific populations proved to be difficult and the criteria was expanded to include individuals in relationships of over three years in length. In the future, it is suggested that researchers use a random sample of interracial couples from a larger pool, possibly from a larger metropolitan area where this type of sample would be more available.

Despite these limitations, this study should serve as a stepping-stone for future studies, which may vary in their recruitment of participants and theoretical frameworks. Below, I outline some possibilities for future research in this area of study. First, future research should examine the impact of the intersection of race, class, and gender on the various types of identity presented in this thesis. To better understand the intersection of race, class and gender, but particularly race and gender, comparison studies with equal numbers of Mexican men in relationships with White women and White men in relationships with Mexican women should be conducted. This would be helpful in distinguishing how gender intersects with race and/or ethnicity and affects individuals in interracial/interethnic relationships. It would also provide a more comprehensive

understanding of how different power dynamics play out and influence individual racial and/or ethnic identities when the partner of color is male rather than female.

Second, an expanded study with other interracial/interethnic couples would be important to understand how dynamic and fluid racial and ethnic identities are, especially among non-Whites. Although this study concentrated on the experiences of Mexicans and Whites in relationships with one another, comparing the data gathered from this study to data about Hispanic/Latino and Black individuals or other combinations would help improve comprehension about race relations in the United States today.

Third, in this study I was only able to interview the individuals involved in the relationship, but I think observing interactions with their partners, family members, children and friends would contribute several additional layers of identity formation among individuals in interracial relationships. Interviews with respondents reflect the continued existence of racist views from White partners, family members and other individuals in the couple's social networks. Therefore, one can assume that different pairings among different racial and ethnic groups would reflect similar views on the hierarchical systems. These different pairings could also create different dynamics within the relationships and generate different shifts in individual identity development.

Fourth, while this study interviewed individuals separately, future research should interview persons in the dyad separately and together to better capture the dynamics associated with identity maintenance and formation. Several studies (Lambert and Dollahite 2006; Valentine 1999) advocate in favor of the benefits of interviewing

couples together, especially in research related to the household and family. Additionally, interviewing couples together can increase the complexity of the accounts collected by the researcher. Interviewing couples together brings insight into the interactions between individuals and informs the researcher of an additional layer regarding identity. However, although interviewing research participants together as couples may have its advantages, it may also prove to be detrimental to the research project as respondents might be on the defensive when surrounded by their partner and an outsider. By interviewing dyads separately and together a more precise characterization of individuals and their partners would be obtained. Moreover, with regard to racial and ethnic identities, observing the interactions between partners would provide insight into the ways in which we attach meanings to identities; how those play out among couples; and, how the perceived and imposed identities are directly affected by their interaction with one another.

Lastly, this current study was limited and reflected a heteronormative structure of dating since it only focused on heterosexual couples in interracial relationships. Conducting research on same-sex couples in interracial dating would add more complexity and depth to studies on identity formation. Furthermore, studying these relationships would further expand studies of identity by including sexuality into intersectionality. Issues of sexual orientation may create different pathways for understanding race and ethnicity within the context of interracial relationships. Overall, same-sex couples are under-researched and need to be included in discourse centering around racial and ethnic identity formation.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

FAMILY & UPBRINGING

- Ancestry/Background (i.e., parents, grandparents, etc)
- Family history (country of origin, immigration, etc)
- Holidays
- Religion/religious festivities
- Language
- School
- Self-identification (personal, on forms, to others, etc)
- Racial awareness
- Racism/discrimination among family

RELATIONSHIP/MARRIAGE

- Meeting (age, how, why, attraction, etc)
- Family/friends reaction to relationship
- Holidays
- Religion/religious festivities
- Families (both)
- Language
- Race/racism
- Race of partner

SOCIAL NETWORKS

- Friends (race, age, gender, how you met, etc)
- Racial identities
- Conversations with friends
- Significant others (age, gender, race, ethnicity, how you met, etc)

RACE/ETHNICITY

- How do you define race? How do you define ethnicity? What do they mean to you?
- Racial self-identification? Why?
- How would you identify your spouse as racially? Why?
- What about ethnically both you and your spouse
- How do you think you are perceived racially? Ethnically? Have you had discussions about this with anyone?
- Have you and your spouse ever discussed issues of race, ethnicity or discrimination? Could you tell me more about what was discussed?

DISCRIMINATION

- Why do you think people treat others differently because of race, appearance, background?
- If you have ever experienced discrimination, how did you handle it?

CHILDREN

- How do your children identify racially? Ethnically?
- How would you identify them racially? Ethnically?
- Have you discussed issues of race with your children? What about gender?
- Who are their friends? Who do they socialize with? (Race and gender)

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Age _____
2. Sex: _____
3. City and State of Birth: _____
4. What would you estimate to be your annual personal income (i.e. What you contribute as an individual to the household income)? If you don't feel comfortable having this value audio recorded, please choose one of the options provided on this note card.

5. What would you estimate to be your annual household income (i.e. What is the total income from all individuals of the household who work)? If you are not comfortable having this value audio recorded, please choose one of the options provided on this note card.

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 A. High School
 B. Associate Degree
 C. Bachelor Degree
 D. Master Degree
 E. PhD
 F. Other, please specify _____
7. What is the highest level of education you expect to complete?
 A. High School
 B. Associate Degree
 C. Bachelor Degree
 D. Master Degree
 E. PhD
 F. Other, please specify _____
8. What is your current occupation? _____

9. What is your racial or ethnic origin?
- _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
- _____ Black
- _____ Hispanic
- _____ White
- _____ Other _____
- _____ Mixed-Race (check all that apply)
- _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
- _____ Black
- _____ Hispanic
- _____ White
- _____ Other _____
10. What is your mother's racial or ethnic origin?
- _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
- _____ Black
- _____ Hispanic
- _____ White
- _____ Don't know
- _____ Other _____
11. What is the highest level of education your mother has completed?
- A. High School
- B. Associate Degree
- C. Bachelor Degree
- D. Master Degree
- E. PhD
- F. Other, please specify _____
12. When you were growing up, what was your mother's occupation?
- _____
13. What is your father's racial or ethnic origin?
- _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
- _____ Black
- _____ Hispanic
- _____ White
- _____ Don't know
- _____ Other _____
14. What is the highest level of education your father has completed?

- A. High School
- B. Associate Degree
- C. Bachelor Degree
- D. Master Degree
- E. PhD
- F. Other, please specify _____

15. When you were growing up, what was your father's occupation?

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